

Martial Dance Theatre:
A Comparative Study of Torotoro Urban Māori Dance Crew
(New Zealand) & Samudra Performing Arts (India)

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Abstract

This thesis examines two examples of martial dance theatre: *Mika HAKA* performed by Torotoro (New Zealand), and *The Sound of Silence* performed by Samudra (India). Both productions were created for international touring, and this thesis looks at their performance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK). The companies' choreography integrates native and foreign dance with their hereditary martial arts. These disciplines involve practitioners in displays of prowess that are also entertaining spectacles. They have an expressive dimension that makes them contiguous with dance – a potential that Torotoro and Samudra exploit.

The companies address their audiences with combative and inviting movements: Torotoro juxtapose wero and haka (Māori martial rites) with breakdance; Samudra combine *kalaripayattu* (Kerala's martial art) with *bharatanāṭyam* (South Indian classical dance). Their productions interweave local movement practices with performance arts in global circulation, and are often presented before predominantly white, Western audiences. What is created are performances that are generically unstable – the product of cultural interactions in which contradictory agendas converge.

In its largest scope, martial dance theatre might include military parades and tattoos, ritual enactments of combat, and folk and classical dance theatre. These performances propagate images of idealised men that create statements of national and cultural identity. They, and the martial disciplines they theatricalise, are also implicated in the performative construction of gender, ethnicity and race. Torotoro and Samudra's performances, influenced by queer and feminist agendas, offer insights into martial dance theatre's masculinist potential, and its contribution to the intercultural negotiation of identities. Prominent European theatre practitioners have sought to employ the martial arts to develop Western performers. If these culturally specific disciplines are expressive and performative disciplines, then what are the implications and complications of this transcultural project?

Notes

Te Reo Māori (Māori language) is recognised as an official language of Aotearoa-New Zealand. Consequently, te reo words are not italicised in this thesis. On the first occurrence of a te reo word an English translation follows in brackets, or an explanation of the word is offered in the body of the text, or as a footnote.

Other than proper names, all other non-English words are italicised. Words in Sanskrit and Malayāḷam (the native language of Kerala) are transliterated according to the practice of the authors whom I reference.

Introduction

This thesis looks closely at two examples of what I call martial dance theatre: *Mika HAKA* performed by Torotoro Urban Māori Dance Crew from New Zealand, and *The Sound of Silence* performed by Samudra Performing Arts from Kerala (South India). I have been fortunate to enjoy privileged access to Torotoro and Samudra, both of which are predominately male dance companies. I helped found Torotoro in 2000 to create and perform *Mika HAKA*. The production debuted in 2001, in Auckland (New Zealand's largest city) where the company was based. Until 2004 I was employed as the company's rehearsal director and tour manager. Torotoro formally disbanded in 2009, and *Mika HAKA* is no longer performed. Samudra was founded in 1998. *The Sound of Silence* debuted that year in their home city, Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala's capital). I met Samudra there in 2005, while visiting Kerala for dance training: I have practiced *bharatanāṭyam* (South Indian classical dance) for twenty-two years. I produced Samudra's performances of *The Sound of Silence* in Edinburgh in 2006, and was the company's occasional collaborator from 2005 to 2009. *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* were created for international touring, and this thesis examines, in particular, their performance in the UK at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.¹

Torotoro and Samudra's choreography integrates native and foreign dance forms with elements of their hereditary martial arts. These disciplines involve their practitioners in demonstrations that can be viewed as displays of prowess but are also entertaining spectacles. They may be seen to have an expressive dimension that makes them contiguous with dance. It is this potential that the companies' performances seek to exploit.

¹ *Mika HAKA* debuted 25 January 2001 at the Maidment Theatre, Auckland (New Zealand). Its international premiere was 1 August 2002 at Dance Base – National Centre for Dance, Edinburgh (Scotland). The production toured widely in New Zealand, and in 2003 visited Adelaide (Australia), and revisited Edinburgh. Torotoro have also performed in Japan. *The Sound of Silence* debuted 12 November 1998 at the Tagore Theatre, Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala). Its international premiere was on 28 June 2001 at the 6 o'clock Theatre, Spoleto (Italy). *The Sound of Silence* has toured widely in India, and has been performed in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

In *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, Torotoro and Samudra's male dancers address their audiences with movements that alternate between the combative and the inviting. *Mika HAKA* features a song called "Hongi." On stage a young man with brown skin and long dreadlocks stands in a low crouch, like a wrestler about to grapple. He glowers and begins a rhythmic raucous chant. He punches his clawed hands into the space before him. Moments later, his crew cut colleague takes centre spot. To the sound of synthesised music he jigs from foot to foot. Grinning, he places one palm on the floor and inverts himself in a handstand. His free hand covers his crotch. In "Hongi," Torotoro shift back and forth between martial movements that present a challenge to their audience, and dance movements that invite and welcome their gaze. In *The Sound of Silence*, a similar contrast occurs. For example, "Rhythm" is a male duet. Two brown-skinned men surge on to stage. They march with stabbing steps to the beat of a drum, and then kick one leg high. Their thighs slap their chests. Their feet hit their hands above their heads. Their gaze is fixed on their toes. After performing a string of kicks, leaps and lunges, one man exits. The one who remains begins to gyrate his hips, with pelvic impulses that turn him. After each spin he looks at the audience with narrowed eyes and smiles gently.

Torotoro and Samudra's productions intermingle discrete movement practices: *The Sound of Silence* combines aspects of *kalariipayattu*, Kerala's martial art, with *bharatanāṭyam*; *Mika HAKA* juxtaposes *wero* and *haka* (Māori martial rites) with the globalised dance form of breakdance. These productions interweave local hereditary movement practices with performance arts that are in global circulation. The companies perform their innovative choreography before predominantly white, Western audiences. What is created, as a result, are performances that are, in some ways, generically unstable – the product of cultural interactions in which contradictory agendas converge.

Martial dance theatre, in its largest scope, is a genre of performance that may include military parades and tattoos, ritual enactments of combat, and some folk and classical dance theatre forms. These performances might be seen as propagating images of idealised men that contribute to statements of national and cultural identity. Furthermore, these performances, and the martial disciplines they theatricalise, are also implicated in the performative construction of gender, ethnicity and race.

Torotoro and Samudra are indigenous citizens of former British colonies who have often performed their martial dance theatre in Western arenas, including the UK. Analysis of the postcolonial intercultural tensions in these performances may offer particular insights into the ways in which martial dance theatre contributes to the negotiation of cultural identities. Moreover, Torotoro and Samudra's artistic mentors followed queer and feminist agendas. The companies' performances present unique engagements with the masculinist potential of martial dance theatre, and invite considerations of how the genre may ordinarily be seen to affirm heteronormative values. A number of prominent European theatre practitioners have explored non-Western martial arts, seeking to isolate dimensions of these practices useful for training Western theatre performers. If the martial arts are expressive and culturally specific performative disciplines, then what are the implications and complications of this project, and its transcultural premises? This thesis concludes with consideration of this question, in light of my analysis of *Mika HAKA*, *The Sound of Silence* and contemporary martial dance theatre.

My interest in displays of martial skills began as a little boy in the seventies growing up in England. My brother and I often played an audio recording of Trooping the Colour – the parade commemorating the British Sovereign's official birthday. We marched up and down the living room to the sound of the bands and the officers' shouted commands, emulating the spectacle of the event that we saw on television each year. A connected memory is of watching televised coverage of The Royal Tournament, in which sailors demonstrated their

acrobatic synchronised drill on a grid of ropes that simulated the rigging of a sailing ship. The grandest of these annual broadcast spectacles was The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Staged on the esplanade of the Edinburgh Castle, the Tattoo featured soldiers on parade and army marching bands of kilted bagpipers, alongside massed groups of Highland dancers and additional international military and folkloric performers. Trooping the Colour, the Tournament and the Tattoo entertained me with the spectacle of soldiers – contemporary warriors. They displayed their discipline and prowess to the accompaniment of music. They were forceful yet controlled. Their performances represented both national might and an idealised masculinity

I lived in Edinburgh in the nineties (my twenties), and each summer I watched the Tattoo's performers parade in The Edinburgh Festivals' Cavalcade. While these soldiers had begun to tour their performance overseas (visiting Australia and New Zealand, among other destinations) non-Western warrior figures were bringing their performances to the UK. Each year in the annual Edinburgh Fringe Festival I found companies whose theatre shows featured displays of martial skill. I particularly recollect a number of Korean companies who performed choreography based on *tae kwon do* (a Korean martial art). What is more, both during the Fringe and outside this festival season shows featuring *kung fu* (Chinese martial arts) often played to large Edinburgh audiences. These performances unlike the parades or tattoos I had seen were not performed in-the-round. They were presented on stages in spaces configured like proscenium arch theatres, and made particular use of the head-on audience-performer meeting that such an arrangement creates. Furthermore, these shows were more like dance. On the one hand the rhythms and body shapes created by these men's martial movements were more varied than those of the soldiers I had seen as a boy, but at times the men also performed dance movements and acted. It is important to note, however, that the moniker 'martial dance theatre' should not imply that works in this genre (including *Mika*

HAKA and *The Sound of Silence*) seamlessly meld their constituent parts – the martial arts, dance and theatre. Rather, in the contemporary martial dance theatre I examine, though these elements (executed with varying degrees of proficiency) sometimes fuse, they may also stand in sharp juxtaposition to one another.

There was a further distinction differentiating the performances featuring displays of martial skill that I saw in Edinburgh from the British military spectacles I had watched as a boy. The predominantly male casts of these theatre productions were from cultures distinct from my own, and they were not white – like me, and the majority of their Edinburgh audiences. Moreover, these men were not soldiers: they were martial artists. Indeed, the examples of contemporary martial dance theatre that this thesis explores might more accurately be called ‘martial arts dance theatre’. In part, performers in these productions present ‘as’ dance theatre the codified and ritualised movements that create the drills and displays intrinsic to their hereditary martial arts. This invites consideration of the ways in which these apparently combative disciplines might be considered always already aesthetic and expressive forms, and one task of this thesis is to elaborate new understandings of what the ‘martial arts’ are. At this juncture, however, what is most important to note is that the martial artists that I saw in the Fringe had an exotic allure. Their martial dance theatre productions were performances of both ethnic and racial difference, for the men’s bodily displays made an exhibition of their somatic traits as much (if not more) than cultural markers. The performers presented, like the soldiers, an idealised warrior masculinity, and they were ‘Other’.

August 2003: I am in Edinburgh, for the Fringe Festival. In a proscenium theatre, with an audience of two hundred, I watch Torotoro performing *Mika HAKA*.² The company are

² Mika & Torotoro, *Mika HAKA* (Edinburgh: George Square Theatre, 3-25 August 2003).

moving vigorously on stage. There are six men and two women. They are athletic Māori and Pasifika teenagers,³ who wear black Lycra hot pants, thick black eyeliner, and little else. Recorded music with a driving bass accompanies their dance. Coloured lighting pulses to the beat like at a rock concert. Centre stage is Torotoro's mentor, Mika.⁴ His eyes and lips are contoured with heavy make-up. He wears a black and red cloak made of fun fur, and he holds a cordless microphone. Mika declaims a lyric in te reo (Māori language) that declares the individual's right to self-determination:

He kohu tau. He kohu tau. He kohu tau.
 Kō au anake, he patapatai ana.
 Kō tāku wairua e rere atu nei.
 Kō tāku ngākau e piri mai.
 Kō tāku tapu, he parerau, he tohu tikitiki.⁵

He also speaks in English, saying:

Be the chooser not the chosen and nominate yourself,
 When you know what you want, you get it.
 You are kings, you are queens, leaders of the pack,
 Retain your personal sovereignty.

The young dancers march towards the audience staring directly at them. They hold their torsos firm and erect and they lift their thighs high with each stride. When the dancers to the fore reach the stage's edge, in unison the company plant their clenched fists on the floor. They pause momentarily and glare into the auditorium from under their brows. Standing, they begin a steady retreat. They switch their arms from side to side in an action that appears to protect their heads but also creates an exhibition of their flexed biceps and their clawed hands. Their gaze stays fixed on the audience. Their eyes flare and the whites show around their pupils, and their retracted lips reveal clenched teeth. Gradually, their heads begin to writhe and their torsos twist. Though it never comes to pass, they seem about to slide into a furious abandon.

³ Pasifika: a term widely used in New Zealand for people of Pacific Island descent born in New Zealand.

⁴ Mika (b.1962), formerly Neil William Gudsell.

⁵ "My identity is hidden from you. Only I can explain who I am. My spirit flows out from me, my thoughts gather to me. My sacredness resides in my crown, the symbol of which is my topknot of hair". The song is titled "Ko te Iwi, e Kore" (I am not of the People) (Mika, Haines, and Hamilton 2001).

Moments later the strident lyric gives way to rapid rattling wooden drums. The dancers continue to perform tense combative actions of arrested punches and clawing swipes to the air, but these are interspersed with more relaxed movement motifs. The dancers clap their hands, slap their chests and bound from foot to foot – as if partying. Whooping and grinning broadly they shake their shoulders to shimmy their pectoral muscles, and jerk their hips to waggle their buttocks.

August 2006: It is Edinburgh Fringe Festival time once more. I sit with an audience of sixty people in a studio at Dance Base – the Scottish national dance centre. I am taking performance notes for Samudra. The company's Malayāli⁶ founders Madhu Gopinath and Vakkom Sajeew (hereafter referred to as Madhu and Sajeew) dance a fifteen-minute extract from *The Sound of Silence*.⁷ The two men are petite and dark-skinned, and they look young. Their eyes are lined with kohl and they are dressed identically in *leṅgoṭṭi* (tight fitting cotton loincloths). Madhu and Sajeew are of the same height, and move in unison: they are like twins.

The two men dance to a recording of a lilting violin accompanied by light percussion. Lying and sitting on the floor the men mould themselves slowly into geometric postures. They mostly gaze off into space, and occasionally glance at one another. Their movements are driven by pelvic impulses that create smooth undulations throughout their bodies. The tempo doubles and the men curl their bodies tight, and then splay themselves flat on their backs. In this way, they roll around the stage in a large circle and then exit.

In an instant they reappear, now wearing long scarlet culottes with open outer seams. A recording of stark drumming begins. A piercing tattoo chirrup over a sonorous pulsing bass tone. Madhu and Sajeew surge from the wings, moving in parallel. With a long stride,

⁶ Malayāli: 'speakers of Malayālam', the native tongue of Kerala. The term is used for Kerala's native people.

⁷ Samudra, *The Sound of Silence* (Edinburgh: Dance Base, 10-20 August 2006).

they lunge into a low stance with an arm shielding their face. Their culottes fall open exposing their thighs. They march forward with stabbing steps, and then suddenly drop backwards to sit on the floor. They roll sideways, and bounce back to standing. They take three strides then kick one leg very high. Their kicking legs' thighs slap against their chests, and their feet hit their hands held above their heads. Their gaze is fixed on their toes. Their faces are impassive. The men seem absorbed in the execution of their movements, and they seem somewhat oblivious to the audience.

Pausing in the midst of this dynamic flow, the men stand still and face square to the audience. Slowly, Sajeev gyrates his chest and Madhu turns his hips. They then recommence their fluid stream of kicks and lunges, punctuated with flying leaps, until Sajeev exits (several minutes later), at which point Madhu begins to gyrate his hips again. He now uses strong pelvic impulses to fling himself into a series of spins. With each turn, he twists his wrists and raises his hands above his head, like a flamenco dancer. He smiles gently – with closed lips – and after each rotation stares at the audience through narrowed eyes.

Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to engage their audience with an ambiguous mode of address. The companies present apparently aggressive and confrontational martial movements as part of an aesthetic display – an entertaining spectacle of moving bodies. The companies' choreography also involves the juxtaposition of acts of challenge with gestures of welcome. As described above, Torotoro march towards the audience with fierce stares and balled fists – while Mika urges them to claim their 'personal sovereignty'. Then moments later they whoop and clap their hands whilst shaking their bottoms to the music. Presenting a comparable shift, Samudra storm about the stage looking out with a piercing stare, as they execute flying kicks, in which their feet make a loud impact

with their palms. Then, at the items end, moving to the same rhythmical music Madhu gyrates his hips, and smiling amicably returns the audiences gaze.

Torotoro and Samudra's eye contact with their audience seems at times imperious and at others compliant. Comparably, their limbs sometimes abruptly and aggressively penetrate the space, thrusting out towards the audience, while in other moments the dancers' move with light and fluid oscillations and undulations that make their bodies seem more vulnerable and receptive. The dancers' minimal clothing might also be seen to contribute to the confrontational-inviting tone of their performance, for it displays their well-toned bodies in a way that might be seen underline their martial readiness but also to offer a potentially erotic spectacle. What is more, when a difference of ethnicity, or race, distinguishes the companies from their audiences this might be seen to contribute additional tensions and ambiguities to the bodily spectacle created in their martial dance theatre.

This thesis considers both how Torotoro and Samudra's particular domestic cultural contexts influenced their creation of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* and the implications of the subsequent presentation of these martial dance theatre productions in foreign arenas, such as the UK. Here, the companies entertained Western audiences with theatrical adaptations of martial arts that in their formerly colonised homelands are now icons of nativism. These performances, therefore, might appear tensioned by the historical relationships between the audiences' nations and the performers' ethnic communities. Torotoro and Samudra's dancing on British stages might be seen to affirm that nation's continuing domination of the companies' homelands. Inversely, the companies' success in this arena might suggest their transcendence of imperial history. This thesis considers how such martial dance theatre performances might be indeterminately moments of 'tribute' or 'triumph'.

Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre performances might be seen to compound or confound Eurocentric norms of gender ethnicity and race. In the UK *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* became disconnected from their homeland cultures. They became, to a degree, elemental spectacles of foreign male bodies. These productions in such contexts evoke essentialist primitivist tropes about the exotic figure of the 'native' man. The companies' might be seen to indulge or subvert the imperialism implicit in these imaginings. To what degree might such potential effects be considered the intention of Torotoro and Samudra? And how might an audience's perception about the performers' intentions alter their own experience?

Mika HAKA and *The Sound of Silence* have their limitations as paradigmatic examples of contemporary martial dance theatre. My analysis will demonstrate how each company's production shows the marked influence of the queer and feminist agendas of their mentors. Moreover, both *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* might be described as lowbrow or popular entertainment created for general domestic and foreign audiences. In this respect, the productions' focus on spectacle, immediacy and visceral appeal may offer particular insights about the market imperatives informing intercultural performance today – forces that may be less obviously exposed in more sophisticated works. But to address the limitations *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* this thesis tests the ideas developed through their analysis by using them to examine a third production called *Sutra*.

Sutra is a collaboration between Flemish-Moroccan contemporary dancer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and monks of the Shaolin Temple, which debuted in London in 2005.⁸ It is potentially the most prestigious martial dance theatre production currently in performance. It has been presented in innumerable cities around the globe as a highbrow Western performance. Also, in comparison to *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, *Sutra* might be

⁸ Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, *Sutra* (Debut – Sadler's Wells, London: 27 May 2005).

seen to differently engage with the erotic potential of martial dance theatre. Moreover, because the production has a multicultural cast it aids my investigation of how a performer's ethnicity is implicated in contemporary martial dance theatre, and also the value of a martial art as a choreographic resource for performers who are not indigenous to the discipline's homeland.

This thesis considers how martial dance theatre engages with the totemic value of the martial arts as preservations of techniques of warfare, emblems of nationhood and models of idealised, ethnically specific masculinities. Martial dance theatre's theatricalisation of the martial arts exaggerates and exposes the spatial and rhythmical organisation of their movement sequences. This might be seen to expose the ordinarily concealed mimetic and choreographic conventions that contribute to the disciplines' modelling of ideal masculinities. Yet martial dance theatre does not seek to dissolve the ideal images of men that the martial arts create, for it is the allure of these figures and their popular appeal (at home and abroad) that these productions seek to exploit – both artistically and commercially. Moreover, in their homelands, comparison of the companies' overtly theatrical martial arts with those of regular practitioners may be seen to substantiate these men as 'real'. And in Western contexts their performance of their martial dance theatre may affirm Eurocentric expectations about the connate identity of men of their race.

This thesis examines the martial arts as disciplines that help form and present idealised, ethnically specific masculinities, but when I first became interested in them as a participant, in my late teens, my approach was somewhat different. My perspective was influenced by my understandings of Jerzy Grotowski's investigation of the martial disciplines in pursuit of transcultural performance principles. I outline his ideas here and those of connected theatre practitioners because my conclusion revisits their propositions in light of this thesis' exploration of contemporary martial dance theatre and the martial arts.

In his 1990 text “Performer” Grotowski speaks of the ‘warrior’:

To conquer knowledge he fights, because the pulsation of life becomes stronger and more articulated in moments of great intensity, danger. Danger and chance go together. One has no class if not in the face of danger. Ritual is a time of great intensity; provoked intensity; life then becomes rhythm (Grotowski 1997b:376).

This text suggested to me that combative disciplines might promise access to the transcultural strata of human experience that Grotowski described in his earlier statements (collected in the text “Theatre of Sources”):

We search for sourcing techniques, those points that precede the differences. Let us say that there exist techniques of sources. But what we search for in this Project are the sources of the techniques of sources, and these sources must be extremely unsophisticated. Everything else developed afterwards, and differentiated itself according to social, cultural or religious contexts (Grotowski 1997b:261).

Reading such texts I looked to the martial arts to offer me potential access to a realm of intense experience – a kind of primordial ritual dimension. The martial arts might be seen to immerse participants in a combative physicality more elemental and concrete than mime and dance, which are ordered by culturally determined aesthetics. Indeed, James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta (who worked with Grotowski) write:

In later years, Grotowski remarked that the best training for an actor might be some form of martial arts. He pointed out that in this type of combat exercise the results are always tangible. If you don’t do the right move, you get kicked (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007:142).

My understanding of Grotowski’s propositions developed through reference also to Eugenio Barba’s ‘theatre anthropology’. In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* Barba says:

theatre anthropology confronts and compares the techniques of actors and dancers at the transcultural level, and, by means of the study of scenic behaviour, reveals that certain principles governing pre-expressivity are more common and universal than would first have been imagined (Barba et al. 1991:188).

The pre-expressive substratum of a performer’s craft, says Barba, is “the energy, the presence, the *bios* of his [sic] actions not their meanings” (Barba et al. 1991:188). In his book *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* Barba clarifies that though the pre-expressive substratum is not separable from the performer’s expressive presence: “This

cognitive fiction makes effective interventions possible. It is an abstraction, but is extremely useful for work on the practical level” (Barba 1995:104).

In the course of my doctoral research I have also closely examined the work of Phillip Zarrilli who has published extensively on his explorations of pre-expressivity “in the light of non-Western paradigms and practices” (Zarrilli 2009:5). Zarrilli’s most recent book *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* can be seen to develop Barba’s differentiation between the presence and meaning of a performer’s actions. Zarrilli describes:

an aesthetic inner bodymind discovered and shaped through long-term, extra-daily modes of practice such as yoga, martial arts, and other in-depth forms of psychophysical training, and an aesthetic outer body constituted by the actions/tasks of the actor’s performance score – that body offered for the abstractive gaze of the spectator (Zarrilli 2009:5).

In their development of an ‘aesthetic inner bodymind’, says Zarrilli, extra-daily practices nurture a “pre-reflective” awareness:

One is not thinking about, but one attends to. This is the most primordial form of intentionality. This is the optimal state of being/doing when practicing martial arts, or yoga, playing a musical instrument, or acting (Zarrilli 2009:33).

My experiences substantiate this description, but Zarrilli’s distinction of two aesthetic bodies seems more problematic. He has explored how Western performers might use an inner aesthetic bodymind developed through Asian martial arts training to inform their performance of Western dramatic works. This process implies a practical and conceptual separability of the inner and outer body. In his book *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology* Bryan S. Turner (whom Zarrilli references) notes that a number of thinkers have said “we should not treat the objective body (Körper) as a separate entity from the inner sensations of the subjective body (Lieb)” (Turner 1992:56). Furthermore, Elizabeth Grosz in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* argues against abstractions about minds and bodies. She says:

If the mind is necessarily linked to, perhaps even a part of, the body and if bodies themselves are always sexually (and racially) distinct, incapable of being incorporated into a singular universal model, then the very forms that subjectivity takes are not generalizable. Bodies are

always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities (Grosz 1994:19).

How, then, might the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ separation that Zarrilli makes – like Grotowski and Barba’s proposition of the transcultural that precedes all differences – be a useful abstraction or an evasion of the specificity of bodies?

This thesis proposes that martial dance theatre uses the martial arts’ aesthetic dimensions and their presentation of idealised ethnically specific masculinities to create affective theatrical spectacles. In light of this perspective and Grotowski’s ideas, what transcultural attributes (if any) might be fostered by martial arts training that are useful for performers who are non-native practitioners and not necessarily men? Furthermore, how might these attributes be distinguished and separated off from other dimensions of these disciplines? The thesis’ conclusion will return to these questions. To proceed towards this destination it is first necessary to define more clearly the martial arts, in particular those practiced by Torotoro and Samudra, and the relationship of such disciplines to dance and theatre.

John Donohue’s 1997 journal article “Ideological Elasticity: Enduring Form & Changing Function in the Japanese Martial Tradition” makes a significant contribution to scholarly discussion about the contemporary significance of the martial arts. Donohue proposes that shifts in Japan’s socio-political conditions have resulted in changing “interpretations” of *budo* (Japanese martial arts) (Donohue 1997:12). Since the end of World War II, he says, these instrumental systems created for “learning and implementing martial skills” have been transformed to emphasize either the “primarily sportive or primarily spiritual nature of [such] training” (Donohue 1997:12). Today, says Donohue, they are multilayered practices.

It is possible to think of *budo* as a means of combat training, a vehicle for spiritual ‘enlightenment’, as a way of preserving valued aspects of Japanese culture, even as a pursuit to ‘make you a better person’. All these varying ideas concerning *budo*’s purpose can be found among practitioners today (Donohue 1997:23).

Deborah Klens-Bigman 1999 article “Toward a Theory of Martial Arts as Performance Art” aims to expand on this analysis. Klens-Bigman says Donohue’s work gives only minimal consideration to “the ‘art’ aspect of martial arts; that is, martial arts as a performing art, as a means of self-expression” (Klens-Bigman 1999:9). Her participant’s analysis of the *iaido kata* (pattern practices for Japanese sword fighting)⁹ emphasises their comparability to theatre acting.

Though the purpose of *kata* is to develop proficiency with a sword, students are encouraged to look at them as dramatic scenaria and to “see the enemy” when performing them. These tactics help the students concentrate and act as a check to verify technique. These scenaria are based on life and death situations. In most *Muso Shinden-ryu iaido kata*, the student imagines himself in a situation where he is being attacked, with the techniques embedded in the *kata* being the counter to the attack. The performer emerges “alive” at the end, having vanquished the opponent. One would be hard-pressed to come up with a more dramatic situation than that (Klens-Bigman 1999:11).

Klens-Bigman also describes the further levels of performance skill that grading tests require:

the test situation is a formal performance in which the repertoire of *kata* learned by a student must be supplemented by proper etiquette in the dojo, and truth of action must be supplemented by clarity in performance of the techniques learned. [...] In addition to skill and clarity of technique, Otani Sensei [Klens-Bigman’s master] is looking for sincerity of effort and earnestness of heart (Klens-Bigman 1999:13).

In 2007, in an online essay “Yet More Towards a Theory of Martial Arts as Performing Art,”

Klens-Bigman elaborates on the structuring principles of *kata*. She says:

[They] are steeped in Japanese aesthetics, while still keeping an element of potentially deadly practicality intact. One can certainly analyze these forms without considering their aesthetic elements, but such an analysis leaves out an aspect of practice that is often consciously taught (Klens-Bigman 2007).

My thesis uses Donohue and Klens-Bigman’s ideas to examine Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre as new interpretations of their Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. These interpretations’ extend the mimetic and choreographic aspects of these ritualised and aestheticised disciplines, revealing their practitioners to be always already actors and dancers of a kind.

⁹ My translation of *kata* as pattern practice is taken from Karl Fridays essay “Kata and Pattern Practice” (Friday 1989:164).

Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre makes theatrical performance from the movements of the intimidation displays and pattern practices that are intrinsic to their Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. Training in such activities initially requires practitioners to master combative movements in the fixed order and rhythmic and spatial arrangements prescribed by their teachers. Most significantly, like dance theatre performances, these intimidation displays and pattern practices are drilled while facing an empty space – a space later occupied in ritualised contexts and theatrical settings by witnesses and audiences with varying expertise about Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. As such – advancing Klens-Bigman's suggestion that *kata* are dramatic scenaria – Torotoro and Samudra's incorporation of intimidation displays and pattern practices in their martial dance theatre creates martial 'soliloquies'.

Kalarippayattu training today begins with mastery of drills called *meppayattu* (body exercises), which involve no weapons. In Zarrilli's seminal study of *kalarippayattu*, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses, and Practices of Power in Kalarippayattu, a South Indian Martial Art*, he describes *meppayattu* as "combinations of kicks, steps, jumps, turns linked in a variety of set forms" (Zarrilli 1998: 303). These movements are the martial component of Samudra's martial dance theatre. *Meppayattu* requires practitioners to move up and down the training space en masse and in time to their teacher's calls. Similarly, today's trainees in Māori weaponry first learn drills for the taiaha (a long wooden club-cum-spear). Standing in uniform ranks and facing out front they execute strikes and defensive moves on their teacher's command. Men with sufficient skill may progress to performing the wero (the ritual challenge – also called the taki), with which the hosts address their visitors during pōwhiri (tribal rituals of encounter). Haka are usually drilled and presented en masse, and they specifically address an audience. Haka have an incantatory and motivational value, but in New Zealand today they are most often staged as intimidatory displays. In such haka martial movements are used to emphasise the meaning of the lyric the participants declaim. In *Mika*

HAKA Torotoro's performance includes elements of armed and unarmed haka. Māori scholar Nathan Mathews defines the first as war dances, and the latter as ceremonial dances called "haka taparahi," saying that taparahi means literally "violent or blustering" (Mathews 2003:11-2).

Today's participants in the Māori and Malayāli marital arts spend the majority of their time enacting simulations of combat, addressing an empty space, a complicit sparring partner, a ritual recipient, or a theatrical audience. The formal organisation of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu*, in particular, makes antiquated yet dangerous combative techniques into comparatively safe pursuits. The immanent violence of martial actions is contained, and their application as a means of conflict is held in abeyance – sustained, in Klens-Bigman's terms, as deadly potential. These intimidation displays and pattern practices might be seen to favour participants' perfection of immediate impressive form over and above a potential combat readiness. They could be described as idealisations of warfare in which the original battle objective of vanquishing an opponent is memorialised but not executed.

My descriptions of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* challenge the natural assumption that Torotoro and Samudra's roles as expressive dancers is at odds with the combative focus of the martial disciplines that they use to create their choreography. Their martial dance theatre extends the theatricality implicit in the contemporary practice of their martial arts. Moreover, in doing so, the companies' productions follow established Māori and Malayāli precedents (summarised here, and examined in detail in the chapters on each company).

Since the late nineteenth century, tribes in Rotorua have staged performances featuring haka for tourists, and in the 1930s haka became an element of Māori concert party performances, staged by tribes across New Zealand. From such presentations kapa haka (Māori group performance) developed, in which wero is also now a key ingredient. The evolution of kapa haka was shaped significantly by the 1972 inauguration of a national

festival (now called Te Matatini), which is the premiere event of a network of amateur competitive events, involving all age groups and spreading across the nation. Broadcasting and international staging of kapa haka has expanded its intercultural address. This process has also been advanced by Māori artists' fusion of kapa haka with Western contemporary dance (as seen in the works of the Atamira Dance Company) or musical theatre (such as the production *Maui - One Man Against the Gods*).¹⁰

A comparable progression of developments can be charted in South India. Academies were founded in the 1930s to perpetuate classical dance – including *kathakali* (Kerala dance-drama, created in the seventeenth-century), which uses movement techniques from *kalariipayattu*. Subsequently, in the early 1980s, Chandralekha¹¹ began using *kalariipayattu* to develop her contemporary dance practice. In the decades following, increasing overseas presentation of performance of this kind has placed it in dialogue with Western European and North American dance theatre practice. This thesis proposes that Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre might be understood as continuations of these Māori and Malayāli performance histories in which the martial arts have been repeatedly staged and used as a resource for the creation of dance theatre.

Using Donohue's ideas, socio-political changes in New Zealand and Kerala might be seen to have resulted in the serial reinterpretation of the countries' martial arts. The Māori concert party and South Indian classical academies could be considered contingencies that accommodated imperialist values still dominant in the early post-colonial eras of New Zealand and India. Thereafter, kapa haka and Indian contemporary dance gave theatrical expression to subsequent nativism that championed a renaissance of pre-colonial cultural values. Today, digital communications, world trade, and jet travel gives both Torotoro and Samudra's homelands increasingly global outlooks, and both companies have frequently

¹⁰ Te Ao Marama Tapui Limited, *Maui - One Man Against the Gods* (Debut –Te Whaea Theatre, Wellington: 19-22 February 2003).

¹¹ Chandralekha Prabhudas Patel (b.1928 - d.2006).

performed abroad. Moreover, in both New Zealand and Kerala there are professional companies creating theatrical presentations of Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts (with elements of dance) for international tourists. This thesis considers the ways in which Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen as a development of such commercial exploitations of the spectacular value of Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. This analysis is complicated by the ways in which the staging of these disciplines as entertainment occurs in parallel to their promotion as icons of Māori and Malayāḷi ethnicity and New Zealand and Indian nationality – cultural and political identities that in some aspects conflict.

This thesis proposes that in post-colonial New Zealand and Kerala Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts are positioned as spectacular expressions of the quintessence of these societies' indigenous cultures. My analysis of this phenomenon develops Donohue's ideas about the significance of *budo* in Japan, and historians' writing about *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and kapa haka. In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes* Zarrilli notes that *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* achieved its contemporary totemic value during the founding of the modern state of Kerala in the 1950s:

kalarippayattu, its martial heroes, and their stories could help assert a unified pan-Kerala Malayali identity, especially during Onam [harvest festival] celebrations which represented, through Mahabali [a legendary king], the nostalgia for a lost past – a period of idealized wealth, prosperity and well-being associated with the 'old' social order (Zarrilli 1998:56).

Michael King and Ranginui Walker, in their biographies of Apirana Ngata and Te Puea Herangi, described how haka and wero acquired similar significance as emblems of Māori renaissance, through the pōwhiri and concert party performances organised by these leaders during the 1930s for gatherings of Māori and Pākehā (New Zealander's of European descent) dignitaries (King 2003a; Walker 2001).

Wero, haka and *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* have also gained international value as emblems of New Zealand and Kerala through the use of still and moving images of these martial arts in advertisements that address a global audience. In his journal article "Tackling Maori Masculinity: A Colonial Genealogy of Savagery and Sport" Brendan Hokowhitu discusses

the conflation of national identity, Māori masculinity, sport and warfare in an Adidas 1999 advert, titled *Black* (Hokowhitu 2004:275). *Black* interspliced match footage of the All Blacks (New Zealand's national rugby union team) dressed in Adidas kit with that of kapa haka artists costumed as tribal warriors performing haka in a swamp (Nicholas 1999). A comparable promotional use of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* can be seen in *Timeless India*, a 1993 film made by the Indian tourist board (Hai 1993). It opens with slow motion footage of two men leaping in the air as they spar with weaponry on a sunny Kerala beach, which the English voice-over describes as a mystical region and tropical idyll.

Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre exploits the contemporary and international iconic value of Māori and Malayāḷi martial artists in ways comparable to *Black* and *Timeless India*. The companies engage with Western onlookers appetite for figures of indigenous heroic manhood. Might Torotoro and Samudra's staging of haka, wero and *meppayaṭṭu* reflect changes in their homelands' societies (in particular, around definitions of ethnicity (and caste), gender and sexuality), or the companies' necessary engagement with international market demands? Their productions might be seen as strategic contestations or opportunist accommodations of Eurocentric (and imperialist) tropes about native men. Discussion of this duality requires consideration of the histories of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* (outlined here and explored in more detail in Chapters One and Two) in order to position the productions as progressions in the interpretation of the Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts as spectacular and iconic practices, and to explore the relationship between Torotoro and Samudra's performances and the queer and feminist agendas of the companies' artistic mentors.

Mika formed Torotoro in 2000 expressly to create and perform *Mika HAKA*. When the creation of *Mika HAKA* began he was performing sexually provocative solo cabaret at arts festivals in Australasia and the UK. *Mika HAKA* targeted the popular British market in a bid

to change Mika's international performance career from that of a queer artist addressing art-house audiences to a main house performer addressing a general audience. Creation of the show began with the recording of its music – twelve original songs in te reo (Mika 2001). The arrangement of these songs was modelled on electronic dance music then popular in British nightclubs.

In 2002, a studio presentation of *Mika HAKA* (with minimal lighting and simple costuming) was given at Dance Base during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.¹² This led to a full-scale staging of the show at the following 2003 festival at George Square Theatre (in partnership with British producers UK Arts International).¹³ The eight Māori and Pasifika dancers who performed *Mika HAKA* in Edinburgh in 2003 were aged between fifteen and twenty-one. All were graduates of Mika's summer school course in contemporary Māori performance.¹⁴ Their dance in *Mika HAKA* was a fusion of wero and haka, kapa haka, Pacific Island traditional dance and break dance or, as it is called by participants, 'breaking'. *Mika HAKA* was a staging of a sequence of songs, theatrically aligned both to pop concerts (Madonna's were a key model) and cultural performances marketed to tourists in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Central to my analysis of Torotoro's martial dance theatre is consideration of how the company's choreographic process was informed by Mika's preceding queer theatre practice. When I first saw Mika perform in 1998 in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival,¹⁵ he wore a green catsuit cut to expose his buttocks, and he was flanked by two Māori drag queens in bikinis.¹⁶ The men's costumes revealed their muscularity, which was further accentuated when they slapped their chests and thighs vigorously and arrested their punches mid-flight as they

¹² Mika & Torotoro, *Mika HAKA* (Edinburgh: Dance Base, National Centre for Dance, 1-11 August 2002).

¹³ Mika & Torotoro, *Mika HAKA* (Edinburgh: George Square Theatre, 3-25 August 2003).

¹⁴ From 2000 to 2008 Mika and Torotoro taught the dance component of the Certificate in Contemporary Māori Performance at Auckland University of Technology.

¹⁵ Mika, *Mika and the Uhuras* (Edinburgh: Assembly Theatre, 3 August to 1 September 1997).

¹⁶ Taiaroa Royal and Tane Mete.

performed the show's final haka. This 1998 performance was, I discovered, consistent with Mika's cabaret career, and especially his deliberate queering of Māori masculinity. This aspect of his performance practice accelerated after his international trip in 1992, during which he explored queer theatre in the USA and Europe. He worked for a time with the seminal theatre troupe Pomo Afro Homos (short for 'Postmodern African American Homosexuals').¹⁷ On his return to New Zealand, in 1993, Mika created the first known haka to explicitly address male homosexuality, called "Tēnei Tōku Ure" (This is My Penis). It was first performed in public after the Hero Parade (Auckland's gay pride event) by a cast of over 150 men.¹⁸

This thesis considers the implications of the support that *Mika HAKA* attracted from New Zealand governmental bodies and official Māori organisations.¹⁹ The production synthesised Māori and non-Māori culture in ways different to those ordinarily supported by such authorities. New Zealand's biculturalism is most frequently expressed through a binary juxtaposition of ancient Māori and modern Pākehā culture. *Mika HAKA*, instead, merged practices revered in New Zealand as indigenous heritage (wero, haka and Pacific Island dance) with breaking – a mode of expression that is considered African American in origin yet now globalized, commercialised and (somewhat) sexualised. This integration of indigenous practices and global trends is prevalent in New Zealand's Māori-Pasifika youth culture, and *Mika HAKA* could be seen to have given expression to this generations sub-culture. At the same time, however, the productions' presentation of this fusion created a particularly attractive spectacle for Torotoro's predominantly white audiences in New Zealand, Australia and the UK. The company's combination of traditional and popular

¹⁷ Pomo Afro Homos (based in San Francisco) was founded in 1990 by Djola Bernard Branner, Brian Freeman, and Eric Gupton and disbanded in 1995.

¹⁸ Mika, *Lava Lover* (Auckland, Princes Wharf: February 1993).

¹⁹ The *Mika HAKA* songs were recorded with funding from Te Māngai Pāho, a Crown Entity creating broadcast materials in te reo. A representative of the late Māori Queen attended the debut of *Mika HAKA*, and the Ministries of Social Development and Māori Development supported Torotoro's development. The UK tours were funded by Trade New Zealand – a government enterprise agency.

performance might be seen to have created a work with an interracial exotic erotic appeal.

Mika HAKA secured domestic support for its revised image of New Zealand's bicultural identity while also engaging Eurocentric fantasies about native men. What might this dual appeal suggest about the persistence of imperialist values in New Zealand and the UK?

The Sound of Silence departs from the established dance theatre idioms of Kerala and South India. Samudra's minimal costuming contrasts with the elaborate make-up and outfits used by folk and classical dancers, and their body movements are more acrobatic than those of these performers. In combination, this means that *The Sound of Silence* offers a unique display of men's bodies presented by recognisable individuals. This exhibition has been observed to have an erotic potential. S.S. Selvanayagam notes Samudra's audience in Sri Lanka were "virtually drooling" (Selvanayagam 2007). Overall, Samudra's performances could be said to create sexual and individualistic expression, contrary to the conservative mores and collectivism that predominates in South India. It is perhaps surprising then to note that the Indian Council for Cultural Relations endorses Samudra. This endorsement, bestowed by New Delhi governmental officials, raises similar questions to those posed by Torotoro's domestic support. In 2006, Abhilash Pillai (Lecturer at India's National School of Drama) told me that in Samudra's martial dance theatre he saw many of the exoticising tropes that he associates with a British colonial portrayal of India (Pillai 2006). How might Samudra's performance of *The Sound of Silence* implicate the company in a propagation or exploitation of a colonialist aesthetic?

The Sound of Silence premiered in Kerala in 1999, and had its international debut in 2001.²⁰ In this production Madhu and Sajeew dance the principal roles, with a supporting 'chorus' of varying size. The men and women of this choruse, aged between eighteen and thirty, are dancers from classical, folk and 'cinematic' (Bollywood dance) backgrounds. *The*

²⁰ Samudra, *The Sound of Silence* (Spoleto, Italy: 28 June to 15 July 2001).

Sound of Silence is performed to original music (played by four musicians) that integrates the instruments and idioms of Kerala's classical, folk and temple music traditions – including the chanting of Hindu sacred verses.²¹ For some performances a recording of this music is used.

Prior to founding Samudra, Madhu and Sajeev danced for five years for Daksha Sheth – a Gujarati choreographer of contemporary Indian dance based in Thiruvananthapuram.²² Madhu and Sajeev's choreography reflects the experimental cross-training they began under Sheth. This regime includes: *haṭha-yoga āsana* (what the West calls 'yoga'), *bharatanāṭyam* (South Indian classical dance) and *kalarippayāṭṭu*. Sheth's use of *kalarippayāṭṭu* to train dancers and create choreography might be seen to connect her work to that of Chandralekha. In 1984, Sheth attended a symposium at which Chandralekha first presented her pioneering integration of *haṭha-yoga āsana*, *bharatanāṭyam*, and *kalarippayāṭṭu* to create new dance.²³ Chandralekha positioned her work as a direct challenge to the solo classical 'recitals' given by female *bharatanāṭyam* dancers. She rejected such performances' idealisation of women as demure and chaste. Instead, says Ananya Chatterjea, in her book *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*, in Chandralekha's work "the focus is always on sexuality, and particularly female sexuality, as a vital aspect of self-realization and spiritual awakening" (Chatterjea 2004:148). In a 2003 essay about her choreography, Sheth explains that her own "bold treatment of sensuality" has shocked Indian audiences (Sheth 2003:105), and in an earlier interview (published online) she explains that Indian critics have decried her work as pornographic (Sheth 2000).

Significantly, Chandralekha and Sheth, both upper caste North Indian women trained in

²¹ The music was created by Kalamandalam Anand, who leads the ensemble. He plays *chenda* (double ended drum played with sticks). The other musicians are: S.Dasan, *mridangam* (double ended drum played with the hands); Kavalam Sajeiv, singer; and Sreekumar, violin.

²² Sheth trained in *kathak* (North Indian classical dance) as a child, and performed as the resident dancer in a North Indian temple for three years (Sheth 2006). She then trained in *chhau* (East Indian martial dance). In 1992, Sheth gave a UK presentation of her first major contemporary production, and relocated the next year from New Delhi to Kerala (Kundu 2002). Madhu and Sajeiv joined her company in 1994.

²³ East-West Dance Encounter (Mumbai: National Centre for the Performing Arts, 22 – 29 January 1984) (Bharucha 1995:125).

classical dance, chose to work with lower caste South Indian men trained in *kālarippayāṭṭu* to create their new sexualised dance.

My thesis examines Madhu and Sajeev's martial dance theatre as a legacy of Chandralekha and Sheth's feminist and primitivist choreographic projects. How might Samudra's martial dance theatre be seen to reclaim the staging of *kālarippayāṭṭu* as a nativist expression of their masculinity? Furthermore, how might the innovative bodily displays of Samudra's martial dance theatre be positioned (like these women's productions) as a rejection of *bharatanāṭyam*, and in particular the idioms suggested complicity with a late colonial patriarchal and Eurocentric containment of Indian performance – specifically its eroticism? Inversely, how might Samudra's martial dance theatre be seen to continue the transposition and adaptation of native Indian movement forms to meet the conventions and expectations of the non-native Western stage? *The Sound of Silence* features movement that appears primal and sensual. Their choreography suggests a return to movement practices pre-dating the modern refinement of Indian dance that create today's classical practices, like *bharatanāṭyam*. But though Samudra – like Chandralekha and Sheth – seem to depart from the aesthetics of *bharatanāṭyam*, they use its elaborated movement technique (shaped to meet the demands of Western-style auditoria) as a pillar of their performance practice. Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to theatricalise (and aestheticise) the soteriological and martial practices of yoga and *kalarippayāṭṭu* to suit neocolonial, Eurocentric expectations about Indian performance.

To address these questions about *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* requires a terminology that can help determine how Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre connects to preceding interpretations of the Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. In his 1975 book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* Erving Goffman uses the model of theatrical performance to propose what Alvin W. Gouldner, in his book *The Coming Crisis*

of *Western Sociology*, describes as a dramaturgical sociology (Gouldner 1970:384). Goffman proposes that our understanding of activities in which we are participants or onlookers is shaped by the “the frame of the activity,” that is the “organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity,” the context and conventions that order the activity occurring (Goffman 1975:247). One aspect determined by a frame is whether the activity it contains is an incident of fact or fiction. Goffman’s interest in such distinctions helps me describe how Totoro and Samudra’s presentation of activities that constitute their Māori and Malayāli martial arts as dance theatre results in a framing that is ambiguous in itself, and which invites consideration of ambiguities inherent to these hereditary disciplines as practiced in their customary arenas. In particular, the companies’ explicit use of antique techniques of warfare as a means of artistic expression invites consideration of how wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* (as practiced today), while being positioned as preservations of the past, might also be seen as always and already such kinds of expression.²⁴ The mechanisms and implications of this phenomenon are revealed and exaggerated in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*.

My thesis, combining ideas put forward by Donohue, Klens-Bigman and Zarrilli, proposes that the Māori and Malayāli martial artists’ actions now have an iconic value as performances representative of their homelands’ culture and a marked – if not wholly – aesthetic dimension. This latter aspect is made prominent in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* by Totoro and Samudra’s presentation of movements from these disciplines in a dance theatre frame ‘as dance’, and juxtaposed with movements belonging to dance vocabularies, ‘alongside dance’. At the same time, however, this thesis also considers how in the popular imagination of Western audiences (such as those that Totoro and Samudra encountered in the UK), martial artists remain closely associated with the instrumental

²⁴ This idea develops Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s proposition, in her book *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, that the frame that designates something to be ‘heritage’ invests it with a new contemporary value – what she calls its “second life” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:7).

violence of antagonistic combat. This perception, and Torotoro and Samudra's dual identity as marital artists and dancers, invests their movements on stage with an ambiguity that might be explored using Goffman's comparison of dancers and boxers.

The dance might now be mentioned [...] the body figures largely, but this time in no way as a utilitarian task performance. The purpose is the depiction of some overall design, including bodily mimed feeling and bodily symbolized fate, and although muscle and bone and training and stamina are certainly required, and problematically so, all this is extended for pictographic ends. Boxers, of course, can display grace and economy of movement, as can tennis players, but this must be a by-product, at most a marginal concern, the main one being physical, describable in terms of a state to be accomplished in whatever way seems most effective at the time – within the rules, that is (Goffman 1975:568).

Goffman suggests that the dancer's bodily display is intentional whereas the boxer's is incidental. I suggest the bodily displays of practitioners of the *wero*, *haka* and *meiipayāttu* sit ambiguously between these polarities. On the one hand, the intense focus and tangible force that practitioners display might suggest they are intent on the utilitarian acquisition of what Klens-Bigman calls 'potentially deadly' combat skills – that they are in some ways akin to boxers. Yet because *wero*, *haka* and *meiipayāttu* are intimidation displays and pattern practices they might be considered displays and simulations of combative intent. In Goffman's terms, they might be considered 'pictographic' activities like dance, implying that 'grace and economy of movement' is the participants' paramount objective. If *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* are seen to frame *wero*, *haka* and *meiipayāttu* so as they appear more like dance and less like boxing, how might this framing nurture Western audiences' neocolonial perspectives of the disciplines' practitioners as impotent nostalgic figures? Conversely, how might the companies' international presentation of these disciplines augment their capacity to be vehicles for expression of contemporary nativist agendas?

These are questions about the repercussions of Torotoro and Samudra's relocation of the *wero*, *haka* and *meiipayāttu* from the frames of their customary practice to the frames of domestic and overseas theatre stages, and specifically those in the UK. Charting this process involves consideration of how each companies' martial dance theatre builds upon a history of

interpretations of Māori and Malayāli techniques of warfare – including the frames that first adapted combat actions to become intimidation displays and pattern practices, and those that further adapted these activities to become performances for domestic audiences. Goffman’s terminology can be used to anchor such a discussion.

Goffman says that a frame creates a “keying” for the activity it contains (Goffman 1975:156). For example, the pōwhiri frame keys a man swinging a weapon in a threatening manner as a ritual challenger executing the wero. Goffman also says “the rim of the frame” is of particular significance because it establishes “the status in reality of the activity” it contains – that is, its relationship to activities outside of the frame (Goffman 1975:156). In these terms, the pōwhiri frame defines the wero as a ritual act, with socio-cultural implications that extend into participants’ ‘realities’. Importantly, Goffman says that “the innermost part of a framed activity must be something that does or could have status as untransformed reality” (Goffman 1975:156). As such, how might the force and focus of the movements of the man performing a wero be seen to indicate, that, at its innermost part, his ritual challenge is a potential attack – and how is this potential negated in *Mika HAKA*?

In *Frame Analysis* Goffman begins by examining what occurs when “untransformed events” are first keyed by a frame, but he notes that often “keyings themselves are subject to rekeying, a transformation of transformations” (Goffman 1975:156). For example, when the actions of the wero (a keying of an armed man’s actions as a ritual challenge) are presented on a kapa haka stage this is a ‘rekeying’ of the wero as a theatrical performance. A man may perform actions similar (if not identical) to those seen in the wero but the kapa haka stage frame changes their significance. Moreover, the framing of such a moment of performance as part of *Mika HAKA* instigates a further rekeying. Multiple frames and keyings are implicated in the creation of this moment: it is an unconventional rekeying of the traditionalist kapa haka genre’s rekeying of the keying by which the pōwhiri makes an armed man’s threatening

actions into the ritual challenge of the wero. On the one hand, in Goffman's terms, the actions presented in *Mika HAKA* may be seen as 'laminated' with all of the keyings sustained by these different frames (Goffman 1975:82). On the other hand, presentation of wero in a dance theatre stage frame (particularly in a foreign nation such as the UK) might be seen to create a keying that is tangential to this history of keyings. In particular, how might *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* be seen to rekey the Māori and Malayāli martial arts in a way that reveals their ordinarily concealed substrata of playfulness and theatricality?

Such questions invite consideration of an inherent instability and indeterminacy that might be found in the martial arts. Using Goffman's terminology the interpretations of *budo* that Donohue speaks of could be described as a process of 'serial rekeying'. Such serial rekeying may also be found in the Māori and Malayāli arts. For example, P. Balakrishnan's English-language *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* manual describes the martial art as a continuation of mediaeval duelling, itself a distillation of guerrilla combat used in feudal skirmishes (Balakrishnan 1995:33). Zarrilli charts the 1930s revival and reformation of training for such duelling to create the contemporary practice of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* (Zarrilli 1998:51). Ian McDonald in his journal article "Bodily Practice, Performance Art, Competitive Sport: A Critique of Kalaripayattu, the Martial Art of Kerala" notes that since the 1930s this practice has adapted to accommodate practitioners' focus on staging displays, in competitions before referees and in entertainments for compatriots and, latterly, tourists (McDonald 2007:160).

Changes in Kerala society might be seen to have prompted the rekeyings of combat listed in this chronology of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, and comparable developments in New Zealand influenced the evolution of wero and haka. Importantly, however, these serial rekeyings might also demonstrate, as Goffman proposes, that once an untransformed activity has been keyed it is vulnerable to rekeying, and that each subsequent rekeying "would seem to require less work" (Goffman 1975:159). He says:

Whatever it is that makes untransformed activity vulnerable to transformation makes transformations even more vulnerable to retransformations; and when the first is found, the second seems likely to follow (Goffman 1975:159).

In this light, though socio-political forces may have contributed to Torotoro and Samudra's rekeying of their Māori and Malayāli martial arts as martial dance theatre, this process may reveal the particular 'vulnerability' of the serially rekeyed practices of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu*. Moreover, Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre offers to Western audiences exotic and potentially erotic displays of native men. What aspects of these martial arts might be seen to make them particularly vulnerable to such rekeying?

Goffman notes "that whatever the vulnerabilities of framing, so, too, will our sense of what is going on be found vulnerable" (Goffman 1975:439). The rim of the frames of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* explicitly define them as theatre performances. There are internal tensions, however, within these frames that make Torotoro and Samudra's productions ambiguous theatre experiences. Firstly, the ways in which the productions place the martial arts in a dance theatre frame increases the indeterminate identity of the wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* as practices located somewhere betwixt a combative activity (like boxing) and an aesthetic discipline (like dancing). Secondly, Torotoro and Samudra's performances in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* evoke Eurocentric tropes of native men in ways that might be seen to substantiate or subvert such a stereotype. How might *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* be seen to give rise to what Goffman calls "negative experience" (Goffman 1975:379)? He introduces this term to encapsulate the experiences of a person who cannot determine the frame pertaining to the activity in which he is engaged.

Expecting to take up a position in a well-framed realm, he finds that no particular frame is immediately applicable, or the frame that he thought was applicable no longer seems to be, or he cannot bind himself within the frame that does apparently apply. He loses command over the formulation of a viable response. He flounders. Experience – the meld of what the current scene brings to him and what he brings to it – meant to settle into a form even while it is beginning, finds no form and is therefore no experience. Reality anomically flutters. He has a "negative experience" – negative in the sense that it takes its character from what it is not, and what it is not is an organised and organizationally affirmed response (Goffman 1975:378-9).

My description of the ambiguities of Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre may provide a vivid example of the intrinsic vulnerability of their martial arts' frames and the keyings they sustain. Though wero, haka and *meiappayāttu* are developed from combat techniques they are not activities in which battle occurs. These intimidation displays and pattern practices might be considered forms of play, in the sense proposed by Johan Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture*. He says:

play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'. (Huizinga 1949:28).

Importantly Goffman takes the term 'frame' from Gregory Bateson's essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy." Frame, says Bateson, implies something elusive:

while the analogy of the mathematical set is perhaps over abstract the analogy of the picture frame is excessively concrete. The psychological concept which we are trying to define is neither physical nor logical (Bateson 1972:186).

In his book *The Future of Ritual* Richard Schechner questions the usefulness of Bateson's frame for describing playful activities. He says it is "a rationalist attempt to stabilize and localize playing, to contain it safely within definable borders" (Schechner 1993:41). Schechner suggests:

if one needs a metaphor to localize and (temporarily) stabilize playing, "frame" is the wrong one – it's too stiff, too impermeable, too "on/off," "inside/outside." "Net" is better: a porous, flexible gatherer; a three-dimensional, dynamic, flow-through container (Schechner 1993:41).

In light of Schechner's ideas, Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre be seen as a net instead of a frame, not creating a definitive rekeying of the Māori and Malayāli martial arts but revealing the fluidity and playfulness in these practices, and in Western audiences' engagements with exotic martial artists.

This thesis' analysis of martial dance theatre considers to what extent the martial arts (or at least those implicated in the genre) might be considered forms of play. Donohue says *budo* can be addressed as combat training, and Klens-Bigman suggests that *iaido kata* – though highly codified – nurture a deadly practicality. In their customary arenas, Māori and

Malayāḷi martial arts can also be practiced in such ways: the preservation of a utilitarian means of combat can seem to be their foremost concern. Yet for the large part their frame of explicit and implicit rules and conventions, elaborated over many centuries, focus participants on creating codified simulations of combat invested with spiritual value. These keyed activities contrast markedly not only with everyday life in New Zealand and Kerala but also with warfare and other antagonistic fighting. Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts might be seen to display characteristics that Goffman ascribes to games and sport. Goffman says:

whereas in playfulness the playful reconstitution of some object or individual into a “plaything” is quite temporary, never fully established, in organized games and sports this reconstitution is institutionalized – stabilized – as it were – just as the arena of action is fixed by the formal rules of the activity. (That is presumably what we mean by “organized.”) And as this formalization progresses, the content of play seems to become further and further removed from any particular replication of day-to-day activity and more and more a primary framework unto itself (Goffman 1975:57).

Wero, haka and are *meippayāṭṭu* are customarily practiced in the ritual spaces of pōwhiri and the *kaḷari* (*kaḷarippayāṭṭu* training space), but in addition to theatrical presentations they are also sometimes practiced as sports. The television programme *TOA: Toa of Aotearoa* (on air in New Zealand since 2007) shows refereed competitive free-sparring with traditional Māori weapons, scored like fencing (Collier 2007). In Kerala, myriad *kaḷarippayāṭṭu* competitions involve presentations of choreographed fights, judged according to perfection of form – like gymnastics. Signs of potential deadly practicality make such activities playful keyings of fighting, which, perhaps like boxing, stop short of being ‘play’ per se. The unarmed intimidation displays and pattern practices of haka taparahi and *meippayāṭṭu* are the martial activities most featured in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. How might the apparent lack of tangible deadly practicality in these particular activities create spectacles that are wholly playful, largely mimetic, and akin to dance? How is this aspect especially revealed through their incorporation into Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre?

In pursuit of this line of inquiry, I refer to Bateson’s discussion in “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” of the ways in which a play frame complicates the relationship between actions

and intentions. Bateson says that actions in the frame of play fighting are ascribed with the overarching message:

‘These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote.’ The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite (Bateson 1972:180).

He extends his analysis to consider other circumstances, in which a greater degree of commitment is attributed to the participant’s actions:

Threat is another phenomenon which resembles play in that actions denote, but are different from, other actions. The clenched fist of threat is different from the punch, but it refers to a possible future (but at the present non-existent) punch (Bateson 1972:181 [italics in original]).

Bateson’s essay proceeds to argue:

Paradox is doubly present in the signals which are exchanged within the context of play, fantasy, threat, etc. Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional (Bateson 1972:182).

The intimidation displays and pattern practice of wero, haka and *meiipayāttu* might be considered forms of play, threat or fantasy as defined by Bateson. The dance theatre frame in which Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre places these activities amplifies the complexities of the gap between action and intention that Bateson describes.

This thesis develops Klens-Bigman’s ideas to consider how the martial arts (used in the creation of martial dance theatre) might be considered always and already performance forms in their own right. As discussed, in the customary frames of the *kaḷari* and *pōwhiri*, *meiipayāttu* and wero are keyed as utilitarian activities in which tangible force with combative potential is developed. Yet in these frames, these utilitarian activities are also imbued with additional significance. They are holistic disciplines and ritual enactments, through which elders inculcate trainees with Māori and Malayāḷi cultural values – specifically, an idealised, ethnically specific masculinity. In their customary frames *meiipayāttu*, wero and haka and all have an “openness” of the kind that, says Goffman, “transforms tasks and games into performances,” but performances “not quite of the theatrical kind, since, on the surface at least, the rationale for these open activities lies entirely outside

the enjoyment provided the viewers” (Goffman 1975:225). In these terms, wero, haka and *meippayāttu* might be considered performances but not theatre. Yet, these practices do show many of those qualities Goffman determines as the characteristics of a theatre performance.

He says:

the staged interaction is opened up, slowed down, and focused so that the audience’s peculiar form of eavesdropping is maximally facilitated, a fact that marks theatrical audiences off from other kinds (Goffman 1975:226).

As intimidation displays, both wero and haka use changes of tempo and spacing to create a spectacle of physical force that will impress the onlookers, and the rekeying of these activities as elements of martial dance theatre emphasises this process. *Meippayāttu* are pattern practices without an explicit function as intimidation displays, but they are organised to accommodate the scrutiny of the observing teacher. As such, *meippayāttu* are demonstrations of skill. And the presentation of these demonstrations for audiences might be seen to have invested them with elements of showmanship. On the basis of this analysis, how might the frames of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* be seen to rekey the performance and theatricality of wero, haka and *meippayāttu* as theatrical performance proper?

Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology, of which his frame analysis forms a part, might be seen to imply that everyday life is a performance enacted by people whose core identity is divisible from the frames and keyings in which they participate. As such, it might be argued that Torotoro and Samudra’s temporary roles as practitioners of wero, haka and *meippayāttu* (or as dancers of breaking or *bharatanāṭyam*) is of a different order to their apparently permanent identities as Māori and Malayāḷi men. Goffman warns against this presumption:

In formulating a separation of some kind between person and role, one should in no way precommit oneself to notions about the “essential nature” of each. There is a tendency to assume that although role is “purely” social matter, the engine that projects it – the person or individual – is somehow more than social, more real, more biological, deeper, more genuine. This lamentable bias should not be allowed to spoil our thinking. The player and the capacity in which he plays should be seen initially as equally problematic and equally open to a possible social accounting (Goffman 1975:269).

This statement has implications for my suggestion that in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* Torotoro and Samudra perform their identity as Māori and Malayāḷi men. Such an observation proposes that the acquisition of such persona is an intrinsic – if implicit and somewhat disavowed – purpose of participation in these martial disciplines; that participants deliberately present the idealised ethnically specific masculinities that wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* might be seen to sustain. It might be suggested that participants’ practice is driven by a part of themselves that retains an essential separateness from these identities – a part that also enables Torotoro and Samudra to make professional theatre of a dramaturgical social process. Does such a proposition indicate the companies’ engagement with a distinguishable inner and outer self – of the kind suggested by Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli’s theorising of transcultural experience, and questioned by Turner and Grosz’s ideas of an indivisible and utterly specific mindbody? Yet, if performance of their Māori and Malayāḷi identities is not Torotoro and Samudra’s intention might martial dance theatre – of which, I have said, the presentation of idealised ethnically specific masculinities is a central feature – be a genre formed by the perception of the audience rather than the actions of the performers?

Theorising of the performativity of identity informs my analysis of how Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre might be seen to rekey the martial arts and dance forms it frames so that their contribution to the formation and articulation of gendered and ethnic identities is exposed and (perhaps) disturbed. My principle reference for this inquiry is Judith Butler’s 1990 essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.” In her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* Susan Bordo proposes that Butler’s theorising of gender is a “poststructuralist, feminist incarnation of Erving Goffman’s innovative and persuasive performative theory of identity” (Bordo 1993:288-9). She says: “For Butler, as for Goffman, our identities, gendered and otherwise, do not express some authentic ‘core’ self but are the dramatic effect (rather than cause) of our performances”

(Bordo 1993:288-9). Butler, however, distances herself from Goffman with a statement that seems at odds with Goffman's (quoted above) in which he checks notions of an 'essential' person distinct from the player implicated in the social game. In "Performative Acts" Butler says:

As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman's which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various 'roles' with the complex social expectations of the 'game' of modern life, I am suggesting that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside', constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication (Butler 1990a:279).

What might be seen to distinguish Goffman's dramaturgical analysis and Butler's theorising of performativity is their differing perspectives on the individual's degree of agency. Goffman's use of theatrical metaphors in *Frame Analysis* implies individuals' conscious execution of the manoeuvres that sustain the keyings that order experience – an idea encapsulated, perhaps, in the title of his 1969 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. It might be said that Butler's work suggests that the keyings that determine gender construct and manoeuvre the individuals. Butler says that the self does not present itself, but comes into being through presentation.

In "Performative Acts" Butler counters any idea of gender as a presentation generated by a discrete inner-self:

gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self', whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act', broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority (Butler 1990a:279 [italics in original]).

In her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* Butler expands on this statement to define the self as arising through the performative construction of gender: "the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (Butler 1993:7). She also suggests that the material body – and its 'sex', which may seem essential and substantial, in ways that gender is not – is also a product of "regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (Butler

1993:15-6). In her 1997 essay “Critically Queer,” Butler articulates the implications of her theorising in terms of the conditions that determine political agency:

There is no subject who is ‘free’ to stand outside these norms or to negotiate them at a distance; on the contrary, the subject is retroactively produced by these norms in their repetition, precisely as their effect. What we might call ‘agency’ or ‘freedom’ or ‘possibility’ is always a specific political prerogative that is produced by the gaps opened up in regulatory norms, in the process of their self-repetition. Freedom, possibility, agency do not have an abstract or presocial status, but are always negotiated within a matrix of power (Butler 1997:16).

Butler’s comments about the interconnectedness of gender, self and agency place important qualifications upon my analysis of martial dance theatre. They introduce a scepticism that counters the sentimental possibility of seeing *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* as vehicles that emancipate Torotoro and Samudra from the national and international socio-political circumstances that give rise to the idealised Māori and Malayāli masculinities with which their performances engage.

It is important to clarify Butler’s term ‘performative’. She says: “‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’” (Butler 1990a:272-3). That is, gender attributes are not the expressions of the individual’s gender but acts whose performance constructs that gender. In Butler’s words: “these [gender] attributes, effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal” (Butler 1990a:279). What is more, she proposes that notions of “an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity” (a fundament of our being expressed through gender attributes) is “part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed” (Butler 1990a:279). In light of this theorising, how might Torotoro and Samudra’s performance be seen to reveal the ordinarily hidden contribution that specialist movement disciplines (such as the martial arts and dance) make to the concealment of the performative construction of gender and (as will be subsequently discussed) ethnicity and race?

To answer this question it is first necessary to consider how the movement preferences and formal vocabularies of the martial arts and dance might be implicated in the propagation of what Butler calls “*a corporeal style*” (Butler 1990a:272). Butler says:

the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts (Butler 1990a:274).

In Butler’s analysis the individual’s gender and the norms by which such gender is determined are both the accumulative product of corporeal styles – the repetition of stylized acts which self-referentially substantiate societal expectations about the difference between men and women. The performativity of gender, in Butler’s terms, is like a self-fulfilling prophecy: men and women’s conventional repetition of repertoires of acts gendered as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ further entrenches the apparent connatural correspondence between the attributes of these corporeal styles and the men and women who perform them.

Wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* be considered acts that contribute to such a process in Torotoro and Samudra’s homelands. My proposition builds on observations that mainly men participate in these intimidation displays and pattern practices, which are (consequently) encoded as male activities that express ideals of masculinity – a perspective shared by specialist scholars writing about Māori and Malayāli marital arts. In “Tackling Maori Masculinity” Hokowhitu describes haka as the quintessential symbol of “traditional Māori masculine culture” (Hokowhitu 2004:275). Hāmuera Mitchell, in Timoti Kāretu’s monograph *Haka!: The Dance of a Noble People*, describes the physical and emotional attributes fitting for a man performing haka – what might be called the masculine corporeal style of haka:

he should stand erect, the back should be straight, not stooped, the hands should be firm, the body should be supple, the feet should stamp properly, the hands should quiver, the tongue protrude, the eyes dilate, the face be expressive. The body should adopt an aggressive stance, from the head to the soles of the feet, including the fingers (Kāretu 1993:69).

In a statement comparable to Hokowhitu’s, Zarrilli describes *kaḷarippayāṭṭu* as the embodiment of an “idealized image of Malayali manhood” (Zarrilli 1998:24). When he first

observed the practitioners' determined stride, undulating spinal movements and sudden flying kicks, he says: "I sensed the potential to unleash deadly force and power. The practical fighting efficacy of these techniques lurked behind the beauty of the forms" (Zarrilli 1998:16). He adds that public demonstrations of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* provide "opportunities for performers to embody, display, represent and negotiate particular interpretations of an 'heroic' demeanour (*utsaha bhava*), the 'fury' (*raudra*) of battle, as well as power(s) attained by [folkloric] heroes" (Zarrilli 1998:53).

These analyses lead me to consider how the martial arts might serve a role, like that of male dance, in the construction of ethnically specific masculinities. This question arises from my reading of Judith Lynne Hanna and Ted Polhemus's writings about dance and gender (which predate the publication of Butler's theorising). In her 1988 book *Dance, Sex and Gender* Hanna proposes that dance is "one of the arts that offers models of gender attributes" (Hanna 1988:12). In dance, she says, "gender is socially and culturally constructed and transformed" (Hanna 1988:241). She observes: "Sometimes expressive forms, such as dance, perpetuate the pervading ideology of gender; at other times they impugn and undermine it" (Hanna 1988:242). In his 1993 essay "Dance, Gender and Culture" Polhemus writes that "dance is liqueur which is distilled of the stuff of culture" (Polhemus 1998:175). Furthermore, he says that in each society "the men's dance style is a crystallization of what it means to be a male member of their culture" (Polhemus 1998:177). These pithy statements condense a longer and more complex statement:

While physical culture may be viewed as a crystallization – an embodiment – of the most deeply rooted and fundamental level of what it means to be a member of a particular society, dance might be seen as a second stage of this process – a schema, an abstraction or stylizing of physical culture (Polhemus 1998:174).

Hanna and Polhemus's statements about dance, read in the light of Butler's ideas, prompt questions about the bodily displays created by *wero*, *haka*, and *meippayaṭṭu*. If such marital arts activities are codified distillations or schema of Māori and Malayāḷi masculine

corporeal styles, how might martial dance theatre exploit and reveal this process?

Furthermore, how might the differentiation of martial artists and male dancers' bodily displays as incidental or deliberate alter their capacity to affirm or disrupt gender, ethnic and racial norms? In her book *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* Sondra Fraleigh states that the "freely assumed performance" of dance theatre is quite different to the performative enactment of gender that Butler discusses, which is compelled by constraint (Fraleigh 2004:95-6). Does the martial dance theatre performer's stage presentation of his ethnically specific gender expose and disturb the ordinarily concealed performative aspect of this constructed identity?

Butler asks, if gender is the accumulative product of the repetition of stylized acts "what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts" (Butler 1990a:272)? How might Tōtoro and Samudra's performances of wero, haka and *meiappayāttu* in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* create articulations of Māori and Malayāli masculinity divergent from those ordinarily sustained by these martial disciplines' corporeal styles? Butler proposes that is it possible to perform one's gender "wrong" (Butler 1990a:279). In "Performative Acts" she says:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style (Butler 1990a:226).

Bordo's engagement with Butler's work in *Unbearable Weight* focuses on her use of drag (female impersonation) as an example of parody as subversive repetition. Bordo explains:

What *can* occur (and what *does* continually occur, Butler suggests) is that the "natural" or "essential" nature of gender is challenged (and thus the system destabilised) from within the resources of the system itself, through parody of it – for example, drag (Bordo 1993:292 [italics in original]).

Tōtoro and Samudra's staging of their Māori and Malayāli martial arts in a dance theatre frame might be seen to rekey these disciplines in such ways that these corporeal styles, and the identities they construct, are parodied.

Some audience members have told me that Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre is 'camp'. Might such a statement imply the affinity of the companies' performances, like drag, with gay culture – meaning, perhaps, the expression of homosexuality or a queer socio-political stance? Like drag, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to stratify audience members according to their understandings of gender as performative or essential. This process is complicated by the ethnic and racial differences that distinguished Torotoro and Samudra from their UK audiences. Their martial dance theatre might be seen to stage ethnicity and race in ways comparable to those seen in minstrelsy. If so, what (or who) is parodied in this process? This question might be addressed with reference to a number of scholars' writings about camp, drag, intercultural performance and minstrelsy. I interconnect these topics to consider how ethnicity and race may be performative in ways comparable to that of gender as theorised by Butler.

Before examining these ideas, however, it is first necessary to consider the implications for my analysis of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* of Butler's qualifying comments (in her works following "Performative Acts") about the constraints that limit the opportunities for the subversion of performativity (and the potential impact of such subversion), and other scholars theoretical discussions of 'being on display' as a feminine (or feminised) position in a Western cultural frame.

In her essay "Critically Queer" Butler states that gender transformation is not an inherent consequence of subversive repetition (or reiteration) of corporeal styles. Butler says that to a certain degree gender is always performed wrong, or, at least, not perfectly 'right':

To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the idea s/he is compelled to approximate. The failure to approximate the norm, however, is not the same as the subversion of the norm. There is no promise that subversion will follow from the reiteration of constitutive norms (Butler 1997:16).

This caveat about subversive repetition of corporeal styles has implications for understanding martial dance theatre. On the one hand, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* might be seen

to create subversive repetitions of gender, ethnicity and race. The productions rekey wero, haka and *meiappayāṭṭu* in ways that emphasises their aesthetic and theatrical dimensions and their presentation of images of ideal men. In this sense, the companies' martial dance theatre might imply that all men who participate in these martial activities are revealed as being on 'display'. Alternatively, it might be argued, Torotoro and Samudra's exhibition of themselves might be seen as a wrong repetition of these disciplines. In Butler's terms, their performances in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* could be seen as a failing to approximate norms – a failure that affirms rather than subverts these norms.

Western historical values persistent in the contexts in which Torotoro and Samudra perform might be seen to gender 'doing' and 'looking' as masculine, and 'displaying' and 'being seen' as feminine. In his essay "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up" Richard Dyer states: "The idea of looking (staring) as power and being looked at as powerlessness overlaps with ideas of activity/passivity. Thus to look is thought of as active; whereas to be looked at is passivity" (Dyer 1992:269). This theorising can be traced to John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing* about Western fine arts' conventions, which, he says, determine that "*men act and women appear*" (Berger 1972:47 [italics in original]). Laura Mulvey's adaptation of this analysis to cinema, in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," has influenced the work of many dance scholars (Mulvey 1989). Yet Helen Thomas criticises Mulvey's theorising of a 'male gaze' "for proposing an ahistorical, universal structure of male, heterosexual looking" and omitting to consider how men too are "objectified through the gaze" (Thomas 1993:159).

On the one hand, Dyer – whose work pursues a queer critique – also questions Berger's tenet. He suggests that a model prepares to be looked at and is an active collaborator in the creation of his or her image (Dyer 1992:269). Dyer positions "looking and being looked at, in life as in art, somewhere among these shifting relations of activity and passivity" (Dyer

1992:269). However, he concedes: “it remains the case that images of men must disavow this element of passivity if they are to be kept in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity. For this reason images of men are often images of men doing something” (Dyer 1992:269-70). How might the perspectives Dyer discusses, which have complicated responses to Western male dance performance, have been accommodated or refuted by Torotoro and Samudra (non-Western companies), and their performances in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*? How might their ‘doing’ of martial actions have countered notions of the male dancer as a passive figure on display?

In his book *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (published in 1995 and revised in 2006) Ramsay Burt suggests that in Western society the male dancer is “a source of anxiety” because he contravenes the norms of heteronormative masculine behaviour (Burt 2006:23). Burt merges ideas found in Berger’s consideration of being on display as a feminine role, and Butler’s theorising of the performativity of gender. His book proposes that the male dancer disturbs Western gender norms because his performance is not perceived as activity (or doing) and his movement exceeds the reticence that is a central gender attribute of Western masculinity.

In the introduction to *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders* Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay cite Burt’s work as pivotal to ongoing analyses of the persistent “stereotype of male dancers as ‘less than masculine’” (Fisher and Shay 2009:20). They also note, however: “In many cultures, there is no stigma about dance being feminine or homosexual” (Fisher and Shay 2009:7). This statement may be true about Māori society: participation in haka and breaking is not seen to feminise a man nor indicate that he is gay. But in Malayāli society such a stigma does pertain to male *bharatanāṭyam* dancers, for this form is considered feminine. Most importantly, the prejudices Burt discusses persist in the popular British imagination, being the premise of the popularly successful film *Billy Eliot*,

now a West End and Broadway musical (Daldry 2000). As such, analysis of Torotoro and Samudra's performance of their martial dance theatre in the UK necessarily involves consideration of the stigmatisation of male dance.

Burt suggests that Western society's "anxiety about the limits and boundaries of masculine identities" produces a "reactive masculinity" (Burt 2006:18). The corporeal style he describes "is not one that actively represents positive aspects of experience but one which passively avoids association with femininity and effeminacy" (Burt 2006:18). This avoidance, says Burt, requires "the performance of masculinity in an unemotional manner as possible" (Burt 2006:18). As such, he argues, Western dance has often presented a "reactive mode of male performance" marked by a "reticence with gesture and bodily expression" (Burt 2006:18). Whenever a male dancer exceeds this conformist reticence, Burt suggests, he fails to present a heteronormative Eurocentric masculinity.

Burt is particularly interested in how a Western male dancer's performance may challenge male spectators who identify as heterosexual. He says:

as John Berger has put it, a man's appearance tells you what he can do to you or for you. If, however, his appearance is also desirable, he is, from the point of view of a male spectator, drawing attention to the always-already crossed line between homosocial bonding and homosexual sexuality (Burt 2006:24).

Burt's discussion of the homosocial develops from that of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* she defines the word, and the implications of her connection of it with the word 'desire':

'Homosocial' [...] describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'. In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire', of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted (Sedgwick 1985:1-2).

Sedgwick proposes that there are "important correspondences and similarities between the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding, and the most reprobate expressions of

male homosexual sociality” (Sedgwick 1985:89). A contemporary example of this phenomenon is provided by Michael Dyson in his 2007 book *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-Hop*. Commenting on straight-queer tensions in the hip hop industry and fan base Dyson proposes that homophobic and homoerotic men now “have a stake in the same body” being “equally invested in the same testosterone-soaked athletic contest” (Dyson 2007:117). Sedgwick focuses away from questions about the potential sublimation of “homosexual genitality” in homosocial bonding, to assert instead: “For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’”(Sedgwick 1985:89).

Considering Torotoro and Samudra’s performances in light of Burt’s analysis (which synthesises ideas expressed by Butler, Berger and Sedgwick) how might their doing of martial movements in their dance theatre affirm an active and emotionally reticent masculine corporeal style matching Western gender norms? Inversely, how might their performances emphasise the capacity of martial movements to displays men’s bodies, and prompt new understanding of martial artists as men always on display – and, as such, potentially passive and feminine (or feminised) figures? What is more, how might *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* be seen to exploit the homosocial-homosexual ambiguity of the martial arts, inviting male audience members to identify with the idealised images of men the productions present whilst not precluding their desirous looking at such men also? These questions will require consideration of how the absence of both explicit performances of heterosexual desire and homophobic words and deeds makes space for such ambiguities in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*.

It is pertinent here to acknowledge that this thesis’ focus on male dancers perpetuates the bias observed in contemporary martial dance theatre productions. Women perform in the genre, but they are outnumbered by the men and have limited roles: the genre’s focus is on

the men's performance. *Mika HAKA* largely duplicates the gender roles of kapa haka. During haka the women give centre stage to the men, but they are prominent in the lyrical action songs and poi items (dances with balls on string). When the company dances in unison the movement vocabulary is based on wero, haka and breaking, all idioms conventionally gendered as masculine. In search of commercial success Mika cast women in *Mika HAKA* to accommodate the gaze of male heterosexual audience members, but significantly the production features no male-female partner dances. Samudra have struggled to retain women dancers (due to Malayāli reservations about the 'respectability' of dancing), and to meet Indian producers' requests for female dancers Madhu and Sajeev have recruited from amongst their relatives. Unlike *Mika HAKA*, *The Sound of Silence* does contain a male-female partner dance, called "Sensuality," in which the man gives physical support to the woman's movements and attitudes. (This item might be compared in structure to a ballet *pas de deux*). Throughout the remainder of the production Samudra's women dancers perform choreography largely identical to the men's. Though Torotoro's women wear more costume than the company's men (who wear just hot pants), their bodies are still very much on display. The limbs and torsos of Samudra's women, however, are covered, while in contrast the company's men wear the minimum. The women's marginalised roles in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* underline the ways in which Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre may subvert Western gender norms. Their presence in the productions welcomes a heterosexual male erotic gaze, but they often join with the men to dance combative martial arts actions – gendered as masculine in their homelands. Moreover, the productions' potential to affirm gender norms is destabilised when the women step aside and leave the men centre stage. The heterosexual male erotic gaze their presence invites may potentially fall on the men – highlighting the homoerotic potential of their performance, and the potential slippage from homosocial identification to homosexual desire that is present in martial dance theatre.

In addition to the subversive effects of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* framing the martial arts ‘as dance’, Torotoro and Samudra’s juxtaposition of these disciplines ‘with dance’ might also be seen to subvert the capacity of these corporeal styles to construct a heteronormative performative masculinity. Other than wero and haka, breaking is the principle movement vocabulary of Torotoro’s men. This is also a practice in which mainly men participate, and it is consequently encoded as a male activity – though the ideals of masculinity expressed are not necessarily aligned with traditional Māori cultural values, as will be considered below. In her seminal essay “Breaking,” Sally Banes describes how the freeze (climatic postures) expresses the breaker’s masculine gender and male sexuality:

The freeze celebrated the flexibility and budding sexuality of the gangly male adolescent body, and looked forward to sexual adventures or commemorated past ones. [...] Another important set of motifs in the freeze section was the exploration of body states in a subjunctive mode – things not as they are, but as they might be – comparing and contrasting youthful male vitality with its range of opposites (Banes 2004:16).

In some respects, Torotoro’s movement vocabulary in *Mika HAKA* – combining wero, haka and breaking – might be seen to coalesce as a culturally hybrid yet wholly masculine corporeal style. This masculinity is subverted, however, by Mika’s presence on stage with the dancers. Chapter One, which analyses Torotoro’s martial dance theatre, will consider in detail how Mika’s overt commingling of masculine and feminine corporeal styles (in costume and movement), and his ‘out’ homosexuality, might be seen to effect a queering of Torotoro’s performance. Perhaps it is Mika who audiences observe to do gender ‘wrong’, thus deflecting such critical attention from Torotoro’s men and substantiating their masculinity.

In the case of *The Sound of Silence*, Samudra’s integration of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam* in their choreography makes their martial dance theatre a pronounced juxtaposition of a distinctly masculine and a distinctly feminine corporeal style. Janet O’Shea’s description of *bharatanāṭyam* as a feminine practice, in her book *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, stands in marked contrast to Zarrilli’s description (above) of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as a masculine practice. O’Shea says:

the choreography reads as feminine, with its lyrical grace, its elaborate costuming and make-up, and, in some renditions, its coy and flirtatious glances. This last girlish, or coquettish stage presence nonetheless appears contained, even innocent. The gendering of bharata natyam thus intertwines visual pleasure with an enduring sense of propriety (O'Shea 2007:104).

Chapter Two examines in detail the ways in which Samudra's men might be keyed as ambisexual figures through their performance in *The Sound of Silence* of both *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam*. It also considers, however, the ways in which the erotic potential of this juxtaposition is contained, or disavowed – in particular through Samudra's integration in their choreography of the apparently androgynous or un-gendered practice of yoga as well.

Butler's theorising about performativity has informed analysis of ethnic and racial identity. In the 1999 preface to her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* Butler says:

the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable to race, but what happens to the theory of performativity when it tries to come to grips with race (Butler 1999:xvi).

In her 2001 journal article “Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic: Cultural Nationalism and Racial Fetishism” Josephine Lee adapts Butler's theorising of gender as the legacy of sedimented acts to explore race as a comparable performative construct. Lee says:

The particular ways in which we perceive, interpret, and value racial difference in the United States today can be understood as a kind of ‘performance’ that takes its significance from not one but, in fact, many layers of social meaning, that history has deposited on bodies (Lee 2001:72).

Lee's article considers how the presentation of an African American corporeal style in stage plays may evoke pejorative tropes or articulate cultural nationalist values. She uses Butler's terms (from “Performative Acts”) when differentiating these possibilities:

Some of these meanings are determined by racist ideologies disguised as “natural” or “biological” hierarchies of difference, “punitively regulated cultural fictions that are alternately embodied and disguised under duress”; others present somewhat more optimistic possibilities for racial performance (Lee 2001:72).

Lee proposes that theatrical performances of a racialised corporeal style could function as a “fetish” (Lee 2001:74). She explains that she uses this word because:

it suggests the visceral impact and basic force that such racial performances invariably have and because such a term has also picked up – particularly in contemporary psychoanalytic and Marxist theory – a number of troubling associations (Lee 2001:74).

Lee considers how theatrical performances of a “radical” racialised corporeal style with a revolutionary potential may compare to displays of exotic-erotic bodies created for, or by, a dominant hegemony (Lee 2001:78). She asks:

“How does one distinguish between the cultural nationalist fetish and other, less hallowed, versions of racialized styles – among them stereotypes, caricatures and fantasies – that had previously been employed in the service of oppressive and exploitative systems? (Lee 2001:78).

Lee’s ideas raise questions about Tōtoro and Samudra’s performances in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. Do the companies’ juxtaposition of martial movements and dance vocabularies create iterations of ethnicity and race that advance cultural nationalism or neocolonial agendas? What is more, how might the racialised dimension of their corporeal style confirm, contradict or evade Western gender norms?

In *Mika HAKA*, Tōtoro’s combination of wero and haka with breaking might be seen to involve the company in the presentation of conflicting ethnic and racially defined identities. In the frame of pōwhiri wero and haka are keyed as explicit expressions of tribal identities that contribute to the rite’s statement of precise ancestry, through its location on tribal meeting grounds and the actions and rhetoric of the collectives participating. Moreover, though kapa haka keys wero and haka as theatrical performance leading exponents of the genre suggest its socio-political import is predicated upon its adherence to the tribal cultures expressed in pōwhiri. Te Rita Papesch (kapa haka performer and Te Matatini judge) explains in her essay “Kapa Haka”:

The tikanga [manner] of the dance must remain oriented towards and preserve difference between iwi [tribes]. [...] Without specific iwi identities clearly marked (in the dance, tikanga, in protocol and so on) there can be no ‘Māori nation’ or at least no meaningful whole as a sum of its significant entities – not individuals, but iwi (Papesch 2006:36-7).

In contrast, breaking can be described as promoting individualistic artistic invention. Banes says breaking involves: “using your body to publicly inscribe your identity on the surface of

the city, to flaunt a unique personal style within a conversational format” (Banes 2004:14). In Chapter One, I examine in detail how ideas of international alliance between non-white peoples contribute to Māori and Pasifika men’s involvement in breaking, and the implications of the juxtaposition in *Mika HAKA* of this globalized (yet largely African American) idiosyncratic dance form with wero and haka, which are ordinarily expressions of hereditary iwi identity.

Samudra’s use of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam* in *The Sound of Silence* is a juxtaposition of masculine and feminine corporeal styles, but historians have also aligned these disciplines, respectively, with nativist and neo-colonial values. As stated above, in *When the Body Becomes All Eyes* Zarrilli describes:

how kalarippayattu has been used to create an idealized image of Malayāḷi manhood as part of the ‘Kerala heritage’, how this historical discourse has been central to the formation of modern Kerala state as a political entity, and to Malayāḷi identity as a distinct socio-political formation (Zarrilli 1998:24).

Bharatanāṭyam might be seen to fulfil a comparable role, being an idealized image of South Indian womanhood that has become (since the 1930s) a pivotal icon of modern India.

However, Mathew Allen’s perspective (shared by Indian women scholars such as Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Rayon Mitra, and Anita R. Ratnam) suggests that Eurocentric values steered this process. In his journal article “Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance” Allen describes the idiom’s conversion of an “‘untouchable’ activity to national artform and finishing-school desideratum for young women of marriageable age” (Allen 1997:33). He adds: “This transformation enfolded and was nurtured in the Indian nationalist movement, which was deeply influenced by European Orientalist thought and Victorian morality” (Allen 1997:33). Might *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam* be contrasted as cultural nationalist and oppressive racialised corporeal styles? Chapter Two considers how Samudra’s combination of them in *The Sound of Silence* implicates these racialised and gendered corporeal styles in a process of

further postcolonial theatricalisation, in which both nativist and Eurocentric values are influencing factors.

My analysis of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* asks how their rekeying of martial arts and dance forms, in particular in the UK, might create a sexualisation and commodification of the identities articulated by these corporeal styles. In his introduction to *Looking Out: Perspectives on Dance and Criticism in a Multicultural World* David Gere proposes the need for examination of “the aesthetics of transfer” – that is, the implications of the presentation of non-Western dance on proscenium theatre stages in the West. In his book *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the South Seas* Christopher Balme’s analysis of intercultural performance determines some of the implications (also noted by Lee) involved in such “cross-cultural contacts” (Balme 2007:7). Balme uses Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of “*mimetic capital*” to explore the “new signs and beings” created by intercultural interactions and the “the dynamics of what happens as these new signs begin to circulate” (Balme 2007:7 [italics in original]). In this process Balme observes the commodification of cultural difference to create the ‘exotic’. He describes the use of an aesthetic frame that accommodates its target audience by making the ‘strange’ a little more familiar. He says:

The totally strange, if there can be such a thing, is not exotic because it would lack some familiar element that makes it attractive to the viewer. Neither can it be totally familiar because it would then cease to be attractive (Balme 2007:9).

Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre combines and rekeys the gendered and racialised corporeal styles of martial arts and dance vocabularies to create performances of exotic Māori and Malayāli identities for Western audiences. This might be characterised as an exploitation of the mimetic capital of the performers’ bodies. What, therefore, are the implications and risks of the companies’ participation in this process, which may replicate colonialist framings of their cultural identities? In particular how might *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* engage with Eurocentric notions of the ‘primitive’?

In her book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* Marianna Torgovnick describes what she calls the grammar and vocabulary of primitivist discourse which is “fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other” (Torgovnick 1990:8). This grammar and vocabulary is, she says, an “ensemble” of “miscellaneous and contradictory” ideas:

Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, or id forces – libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, parts of its harmonies. Primitives are free (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Behind such tropes Torgovnick sees a maxim, which positions the primitive as “different from (usually opposite to) the [Western] present” (Torgovnick 1990:8). She says:

Those who study or write about the primitive usually begin by defining it as different from (usually opposite to) the present. After that, reactions to the present take over. Is the present too materialistic? Primitive life is not – it is a precapitalist utopia in which only use value, never exchange value, prevails. Is the present sexually repressed? Not primitive life – primitives live life whole, without fear of the body. [The] needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it. It is our ventriloquist’s dummy – or so we like to think (Torgovnick 1990:8).

My discussion of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* particularly considers several ideas put forward by Torgovnick. The erotic potential of Torotoro and Samudra’s staged performance of martial arts movements might be seen to engage with Eurocentric ideas that describe primitives as “uncivilised” physical beings, exempt “from the repression of sexuality and control of aggression” that constrain Western life (Torgovnick 1990:228). Moreover, the companies’ martial dance theatre interact with tropes that, says Torgovnick in her book *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy*, code the primitive as the feminine collective counterpart to masculine individualistic civilisation (Torgovnick 1997:14)? Their performances emphasise the “double valance” that identifies the primitive as “both violent and spiritual” (Torgovnick 1997:14). How might the companies’ exhibition of primitive attributes defuse or confuse Western anxieties about the male dancer that Burt identifies?

Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre might be seen to implicate the companies in a process of self-minstrelsy such as that which Katrin Sieg analyses in her book

Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany. Sieg examines Native American and Turkish performers replicating European stereotypes about their culture. She asks:

what happens when the referent takes the stage to lay claim to the alluring and persistent figurations on the Wild West and the Orient in the Western imagination for political purposes of her own. [...] Does the entrance of the referent and her appropriation of the visual apparatus trap her in the ethnic coordinates of the body, even as she contests its devaluation (Sieg 2002:222)

Sieg proposes that on the one hand self-minstrelsy may be part of a “Brechtian paradigm of drag, which entails the insertion of a critical (and comic) distance between the actor and her roles, in order to denaturalize and historicise them,” but on the other it may also court “essentialist readings” of ethnicity and race (Sieg 2002:222). Talking about the work of performance artist Spiderwoman, Sieg asks:

how are spectators to distinguish between Native American actor and character if the role corresponds so closely to long-cherished assumptions about Indian authenticity, captured especially by the mysticism of Native American spirituality? Does not the actor’s body risk lending corporeal proof to images believed to be accurate? (Sieg 2002:222).

Sieg proposes that “self-minstrelsy” creates a “double address” to “the witness who sees drag” and “the dupe who sees mimesis” (Sieg 2002:253). In Lee’s terms, self-minstrelsy may fetishise the performer’s body in ways that reinforces essentialist racist ideologies. This thesis, however, uses discussions about camp and flirtation to complicate this binary, and to describe how the ambiguities of Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre creates exotic performances indeterminately positioned between Sieg’s drag and mimesis, and Lee’s radical and oppressive racialised corporeal styles.

Academic writing about camp frequently references Susan Sontag’s 1966 essay “Notes on Camp.” Sontag describes camp as a topsy-turvy sensibility: camp “incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’”—it prioritises aesthetic experience (Sontag 1966:287). Camp also allows one to “be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious” (Sontag 1966:276). Torotoro and Samudra’s integration of their indigenous martial arts, hereditary techniques of combat, in a dance theatre frame could be seen to create a similar inversion.

Indeed, all theatre might be considered congruent with a camp ontology, which, says Sontag, sees “Being-as-Playing-a-Role” (Sontag 1966:280).²⁵ Crucially, Sontag proposes that “the metaphor of life as theatre is peculiarly suited as a justification and projection of a certain aspect of the situation of homosexuals,” though camp is not, she says, an exclusively gay sensibility (Sontag 1966:290).

In his 1994 essay “Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp” Moe Meyer contrastingly states that camp is a “specifically queer parody” (Meyer 1994:11). He also contests Sontag’s claim that “the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical” (Sontag 1966:277). Parody, Meyer proposes, is the process by which the marginalised and disenfranchised use the existing structures of signification that are controlled by the dominant order to advance their own interests (Meyer 1994:11). A queer ontology, he says, is founded on “a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts” (Meyer 1994:2-3). In other words, a queer ontology recognises identity to be constructed in ways that both Butler and Goffman theorise. If Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre is seen to disrupt corporeal styles might *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* be considered queer parody?

Sontag offers a distinction useful to this discussion. She says: “One must distinguish between naïve and deliberate Camp” (Sontag 1966:282). She adds: “In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness that fails” (Sontag 1966:283). Positioning Mika’s individual performance as an exemplar of deliberate camp, Torotoro and Samudra’s endeavour to sustain the combative intensity of their wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* in the aestheticising, exoticising and potentially eroticising martial dance theatre frame might be seen to create naïve camp. Furthermore, if their serious intentions are seen to ‘fail’, does this

²⁵ Frame analysis might be seen to promote this perspective too. Gouldner says of Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology “the way of life it celebrates is a form of ‘camp’” (Gouldner 1970:384).

create a disappointing shortfall or a queer parody of the gender and racial norms that Western values attribute to primitive native men?

In Chapter Three's comparative discussion of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* the analogy of flirtation is introduced to describe the ways in which Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre appears to vacillate between: i) offering a combative and inviting audience address; ii) focussing on serious content and aesthetic style; iii) and creating a deliberate queer parody or naïve camp failure. Scholars writing about flirtation often reference Georg Simmel's essay "Flirtation" (first published in 1909). This masculinist analysis of the coquette offers a detailed consideration of the ambiguous interactions of flirting. Simmel's flirtation, like Bateson's play, is a frame in which actions are rekeyed so that they do not denote what would ordinarily be denoted by those actions. Contradictory possibilities are sustained:

flirtation is no less distant from having and not-having – or, actively expressed, from giving and not-giving. However, it does not stand above them but rather, one might say, between them, insofar as it maintains the interests that it has in both or gives to both in an unstable equilibrium; or it compounds them in such a way that one is always neutralized by the other, as in an infinite process (Simmel 1984:147).

On one level, Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to literally engage with flirtation. In a postcolonial intercultural context, the men's bodily display, through their performance of aggressive movements and sensual gestures, might be seen to communicate messages to their Western audiences comparable to those Simmel attributes to the coquette.

Simmel speaks of:

Flirtation as flattery: "Although you might indeed be able to conquer me, I won't allow myself to be conquered." Flirtation as contempt: "Although I would actually allow myself to be conquered, you aren't able to do it." Flirtation as provocation: "Perhaps you can conquer me, perhaps not – try it!" (Simmel 1984:135).

Torotoro and Samudra might be seen flirt through their ambiguous visceral engagement of their audiences. Furthermore, the companies' martial dance theatre might be seen to naïvely or deliberately flirt with, and through, the essentialist tropes of gender and race their performances evoke.

This thesis explores how Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre exploits vulnerabilities in the frames of their martial arts. These vulnerabilities are amplified and rendered more unstable in the companies' performances. Martial dance theatre – including examples beyond those of Torotoro and Samudra – might be seen as a genre that exceeds the binary address to dupe and witness that Sieg describes. In his essay “Camp, Masculinity, Masquerade” Kim Michasiw describes the ‘camp-performative’.

What is constructed by the camp-performative is a set of sets of limits, the several skins of a shallot, fixing the viewers in ranges of ironic contract: those who do not know at all; those who think they know but do not know; those who know, but only from without and are afraid really to know; those who do know but are appalled, or are laughing, or at laughing at the wrong pitch; and you. All of these limits depend, of course, on recognition on the part of the viewer but these recognitions are structured by the individual viewer's relative ignorance or knowledge of a stable set of codes and on the attitude characteristically struck by the viewer to that ignorance or knowledge (Michasiw 1997:161).

Martial dance theatre might be seen to stratify audience members in shifting ranges of ironic contract such as Michasiw describes. But I propose that in this genre it is the viewers' relationship to ideas about the essential or performative basis of gender, ethnicity and race that produces this effect, rather than a stable set of codes.

Chapter One and Two analyse, in turn, Torotoro and Samudra's seminal performances *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. This necessarily includes consideration of how preceding Māori and Malayāḷi stagings of the martial arts and the careers of Torotoro and Samudra's mentors Mika and Sheth have informed the companies' practices. I use a combination of Rudolf Laban's movement analysis system and the ‘witnessing’ developed in Mary Stark Whitehouse's ‘Authentic Movement’ to explore Torotoro and Samudra's choreographic integration of their martial arts with their principal dance forms, breaking and *bharatanāṭyam*.²⁶ Laban's system allows for a detailed consideration of the ‘what, when and how’ of Torotoro and Samudra's movement on stage – or their use of changes in direction,

²⁶ I often participated in Torotoro's training, and independent of my involvement with Samudra I have trained in *bharatanāṭyam* since 1987 and *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* since 1997, in Kerala and Scotland.

time, and weight.²⁷ In addition to the objective ‘I see’ perspective promoted by Laban’s analysis, the witnessing used in Authentic Movement includes the subjective responses of ‘I feel’ and ‘I imagine’.²⁸

I have enjoyed privileged access to both Torotoro and Samudra, participating and contributing to training and rehearsal processes. I have lived and toured with the companies in their homelands and abroad. I also performed with both companies during their 2009 collaboration.²⁹ This thesis revisits these experiences from a ‘participant-observer’ ethnographic stance informed by self-reflective anthropological practices.³⁰ In this retrospection I attempt to keep foregrounded the ethnic and cultural difference that set me apart from Torotoro and Samudra, and on which our collaborations were predicated. I have always occupied a liminal position in relationship to these companies who might be characterised as discrete Māori-Pasifika and Malayāḷi communities. I belong to the Eurocentric culture whose tropes determining gender and race this thesis in part explores. In some respects my challenge has been to elaborate how their martial dance theatre engages with Western notions about primitive native men with out reifying this figure.

Chapter Three integrates and develops the proceeding chapters’ analyses of Torotoro and Samudra’s performances. This chapter particularly considers how the aesthetics of transfer be might seen to rekey martial dance theatre performances as exotic productions. How might martial dance theatre be considered a genre that commodifies alterity? How might the legacies of colonial history be implicated in this process? Might martial dance theatre subvert the Eurocentric archetypes it invokes? These questions are explored in Chapter Three

²⁷ My approach to Laban’s movement analysis (as detailed in his book *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage*) is informed by my training in this field from 1987 to 1992 at University of Birmingham (UK).

²⁸ My approach to the witnessing practice of Authentic Movement is informed by my training with movement therapist Kedzie Penfield in 1993 in Edinburgh.

²⁹ Samudra and Torotoro, *Pranavam* (Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: Samudra Festival, Tagore Theatre, 25 January 2009).

³⁰ The seminal essay collection *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* has oriented my approach (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

with particular reference to Torotoro and Samudra's collaboration in 2009 and examination of how *Sutra* might be seen to offer an example of contemporary martial dance theatre different to that presented in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*.

The concluding chapter summarises the key findings of this thesis, and considers how they might offer new perspectives on theories about the transcultural aspects of the martial arts, and their value for training Western theatre performers. How might martial arts training develop a neutral presence? How might this proposition be challenged by consideration of the pervasive and culturally determined performativity of gender, ethnicity and race embedded in such martial disciplines? Might contemporary martial dance theatre offer new perspectives on the theories and working principles developed by Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli?

Chapter One: Torotoro

This chapter explores *Mika HAKA*, which Torotoro performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2002 and 2003.¹ Martial dance theatre rekeys martial arts practices as dance theatre by placing them in the frame of the Western stage, and through their juxtaposition and integration with dance forms. In the case of Torotoro, this rekeying combines the ritualised marae practices of wero and haka with the globalised dance form of breaking. As such, *Mika HAKA* is a performance in which contrasting traditionalist and contemporary articulations of Māori masculinity are interwoven. A question recurrent in this chapter is how this combination substantiates or destabilises these somewhat conflicting identities.

It is through Torotoro's Edinburgh performances, which addressed a predominantly white European audience, that the company can be seen to have developed their particular martial dance theatre practice. Mika's speeches in *Mika HAKA* declare the production is a Māori work about Māori life, but it is also a spectacle that evokes Eurocentric stereotypes concerning both native warriors and non-white urban youth. The meeting of these figures in the productions' Western dance theatre frame gives *Mika HAKA* the balance of the strange and familiar that Balme determines as the vital constituents of the 'exotic' (Balme 2007:9). Furthermore, Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* has a pronounced erotic potential, in that the dancers are deliberately costumed to display their athletic bodies in a titillating way, and they do so along side Mika's own overtly sexualised and queer performance.

Torotoro's martial dance theatre might be seen to theatricalise wero, haka and breaking to create a sexualised performance with a commercial value. At the same time, the company's staging of these disciplines might also be seen to parody these corporeal styles in such a way that their contribution to both Māori and Eurocentric norms of gender, ethnicity

¹ Mika & Torotoro, *Mika HAKA* (Edinburgh: Dance Base, National Centre for Dance, 1-11 August 2002) & Mika & Torotoro, *Mika HAKA* (Edinburgh: George Square Theatre, 3-25 August 2003).

and race are destabilised. Mika's participation in this process is guided by his queer sensibility. His spectacular persona in *Mika HAKA* – half-native-warrior and half-drag-queen – is an example of what Susan Sontag calls “deliberate camp” (Sontag 1966:282). How might Torotoro's performance be characterised? Is it queer too? Is it camp – naïve or deliberate – even though, or because, the dancers intend otherwise?

Torotoro's combination of wero and haka with breaking is unique to the company, and it is the principle focus of this chapter. In particular, I consider the implications of Torotoro's juxtaposition and integration of hereditary martial expressions of collective iwi identity with an African American – now globalised – dance form, centred on individual expression. How is each of these movement practices rekeyed by its juxtaposition with the other, and their presentation together in a Western dance theatre frame, in Torotoro's homeland and overseas? In particular, how might *Mika HAKA* in Edinburgh communicate a different message to *Mika HAKA* in New Zealand?

The title *Mika HAKA* invites comparison of the production with kapa haka, and this chapter examines the production's relationship to this genre's preceding presentation of Māori marital rites as theatre performances. On the one hand, *Mika HAKA* might be considered the antithesis of kapa haka, which is widely considered a performance practice that preserves inherited Māori culture for Māori benefit. Though *Mika HAKA* uses components of a kapa haka the production distinctly departs from the genre's traditional Māori cultural parameters. Torotoro's martial dance theatre combines Māori, Pacific Island and global movement vocabularies, and the production is lit and amplified like a pop concert. What is more, the syncretic cultural fusion of *Mika HAKA* is organised to ensure that Torotoro's performance has an erotic exotic appeal for non-Māori audiences. Kapa haka and *Mika HAKA* might be seen to exploit the same framing vulnerability that allows the ritualised practices of wero and haka to be readily rekeyed as theatre. They do so, however, to different ends: kapa haka

places emphasis on the totemic and intracultural – ‘by Māori for Māori’ – value of such a rekeying; *Mika HAKA* exploits its commercial and intercultural potential – to which *Mika*’s agenda of queer parody contributes an added complexity.

This chapter first examines how the Western dance theatre frame of *Mika HAKA* enhances the aestheticism and theatricality intrinsic to the wero and the haka, and expands the use of these ritual marae practices to create theatre performance, as pioneered in kapa haka. The inclusion of breaking in *Mika HAKA* is then examined. Consideration is given to how the production’s juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary expressions of wero, haka and breaking reveals the contribution each makes to the performative construction of Māori masculinity. This chapter also considers *Mika*’s influence on Torotoro’s martial dance theatre – in particular, the way in which *Mika HAKA* maximised upon the erotic appeal of their performance by framing them as Western audiences’ primitive ‘Other’.

The way in which *Mika HAKA* evokes Eurocentric Othering tropes might be seen to make the production quite distinct from kapa haka. Kapa haka is understood to stage iwi cultural practices, which pre-date Māori contact with Europeans, for Māori audiences. This chapter, however, examines how the historicised Māori identity presented in kapa haka – though understood to counter colonialism – might be seen to contribute to the defining of Māori as Other. Contemporary Māori culture necessarily negotiates with the ethnically (and racially) determined Othering that the bicultural structure of New Zealand sustains. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to engage with these mechanisms of Othering directly. Torotoro’s martial dance theatre could be considered a form of cultural drag, which exploits Māori Otherness to evolve a theatrical native identity saleable to Western audiences.

In contemporary martial dance theatre, the martial arts are removed from their customary contexts. Their specific and complex histories and cultural positioning are elided, and exclusive emphasis is placed on their value as elemental spectacles. In the case of *Mika*

HAKA wero and haka are transported out of the physical and conceptual frame of the marae (tribal meeting grounds) where these martial ritual enactments are enacted according to kawa (inherited protocols). The wero is an armed challenge performed by an individual man, called the kaiwero (ritual challenger). Both men and women perform (and lead) haka, but today men are usually to the fore, and haka is the heart of male kapa haka performers' practice. The leader of the haka is called the kaea. In *Mika HAKA*, aspects of the kaiwero and kaea are combined to create Mokoera Te Amo's performance role. The identity he embodies might be characterised as the archetypal and ideal Māori man, according to cultural values dominant in New Zealand. His role in *Mika HAKA* might be placed in opposition to the contemporary persona of the breakdancer – or b-boy, as male practitioners call themselves – who is discussed later in this chapter.

Just before Mokoera first appears in *Mika HAKA*, Mika narrates an account of the Māori settlement of New Zealand. Over sonorous bells, he describes the arrival of a “dynastic clan” in a giant canoe on the untouched shores of “a land of smoking volcanoes and boiling lakes.” As Mika finishes this evocation of a mystical natural scene, Mokoera steps out from the upstage wings. Mist swirls about him. He is backlit with a green glow that casts him in silhouette. He appears to be a primordial man. He holds a weapon – a tewhatewha (a wooden spear with a broad head) – horizontal above his head. His waist-long dreadlocks hang loose and he wears only black shorts. Mokoera half-crouches, head cocked at an angle. He is still and alert, like a hunter intent on his prey, attuned to nature. The music becomes a simple melody in a minor key and Mokoera steals forward with smooth and even steps. He sweeps the space ahead with his spear. When he reaches centre stage he pauses. Holding his spear close to his chest he looks directly at the audience with a bold gaze. Suddenly, he darts forward. He slashes the air violently with his spear and emits terse wild cries. He seems to be striking hard at an imaginary opponent. His attack subsides. He slows to a halt and kneels

down. He sticks out his tongue and widens his eyes, glaring at the audience. From the rear of the stage Mika speaks: “Kua tae mai te Māori – the Māori have arrived.”

This moment of performance shows how Mokoera’s martial actions on stage intercept and confuse Western tropes concerning gender and race. Wielding his weapon, to the sound of haunting music, he stalks a misty stage that Mika’s narration has described as a strange wilderness. As such, he is keyed as a figure whose potential danger and mystical aura make him an embodiment of the non-Western primitive that Torgovnick describes (Torgovnick 1990:8). In addition to marking him as primitive, Mokoera’s disciplined demonstration of weaponry skills might also be seen to create an example of the ‘masculinity-as-activity’ that Dyer speaks of, and a reticent performance of masculinity of the kind that Burt identifies (Dyer 1992:269-70; Burt 2006:18). As such, Mokoera’s performance can be seen to meet the ideals of a heteronormative Western masculinity. Yet this potential sits in tension with the ways in which his primitive persona suggests his inclusion in the tribal collective and the natural world, which Torgovnick says Western thought genders as female (Torgovnick 1997:14). Moreover, Mokoera doesn’t hit anybody or anything with his weapon: he might not be ‘active’, so to speak. If he is just a man on display, he might seem (in Berger’s analysis, as discussed by Dyer) passive and perhaps feminised (Dyer 1992:269)?

In a number of respects Mokoera’s performance in *Mika HAKA* replicates the actions and symbolism of the wero. On the marae, the kaiwero issues his challenge on behalf of the host tribe to whom he belongs. *Mika HAKA* inflates this representative role to key Mokoera as “Te Māori” – the Māori people as a whole. The kaiwero’s appearance during pōwhiri marks a shift from preliminary greetings to a period of formal challenge. Similarly, Mokoera’s entry in *Mika HAKA* is positioned at a turning point in the performance structure. He appears just after the show’s opening number. These likenesses, however, might be deemed superficial. In the dance theatre frame of *Mika HAKA*, Mokoera presents a semblance of the substantial

figure that he is on the marae. To paraphrase Bateson, his performance on stage of the martial actions that constitute the wero do not denote that which his martial actions in the frame of the pōwhiri denote (Bateson 1972:180). To examine this proposition it is necessary to establish more precisely the organizational premises that key Mokoera's actions in the pōwhiri as the wero and invest them with their ritual value.

Pōwhiri mediates the meeting between a host Māori community and a visiting group. The rite remembers the dangers of potential combat implicit in inter-tribal meetings in earlier eras, but it also acknowledges antagonism that may be present in such gatherings today. Anne Salmond notes in her book *Hui: A Study of Maori Ceremonial Gatherings* that “suspicion and hot pride” mean that pōwhiri rituals in modern times continue to be “played out in a keenly competitive spirit” (Salmond 1975:16). Furthermore, pōwhiri sustains the metaphysics of pre-contact Māori culture: it is a spiritual rite that protects the holistic integrity of the host community in the face of the visitors who are potential pollutants.

Pōwhiri begins with the hosts and visitors at a distance, facing one another.² A female elder from the host community makes a welcome call inviting the visitors to proceed. Their visitors' representative replies in kind, and they move slowly towards the hosts. At this moment, the kaiwero suddenly appears from behind the hosts. He zigzags toward the visitors, darting erratically and prancing high on the balls of his feet. He swipes the air with his weapon's blade, and makes stabbing thrusts with its point. Sometimes he may pause, bobbing and swaying, balanced on one leg. Though speechless, he lets out guttural calls and aspirates loudly. The kaiwero gradually approaches the visitors' senior male representative, the official recipient of the challenge, who stands to the fore of his party. The swipes of the kaiwero's weapon pass close to him. When the kaiwero decides he has adequately asserted his might, he crouches and places a piece of greenery at the visitor's feet and retreats a few paces. He

² In my description of pōwhiri I make reference to ceremonies in which I have participated over the past decade, at marae in Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Rotorua, Dunedin, and Christchurch.

watches closely to see the visitor picks up the token, thus signalling peaceful intentions.

When the visitor does so (as he normally will today) the kaiwero turns obliquely and slaps his haunch, signalling the visitors may safely move further onto the marae. He scuttles ahead of them, and moves out of sight. His role is complete.

Mokoera's actions during his enactment of the arrival of Te Māori replicate the overall pattern of the wero. He advances towards the audience, displaying his weaponry skills and making intimidatory calls and facial expressions. But no challenge per se is issued in *Mika HAKA*. As the kaiwero, Mokoera's actions address a particular recipient. The two men's representative roles invest their meeting with a socio-religious symbolism, and their proximity to one another suggests Mokoera's display of prowess could become an attack. His enactment of the arrival of Te Māori in *Mika HAKA* replicates the physical actions he performs on his marae as kaiwero, but in the dance theatre frame of the production these actions amount to something quite different.

In *Mika HAKA*, Mokoera's movements create a display of prowess that is like the wero in appearance but lacks both its ritual significance and, perhaps, its element of threat. His intimidation display is framed by the conventions of Western proscenium arch theatre. From the stage he addresses the auditorium and the audience en masse. For a New Zealand audience this context might make *Mika HAKA* comparable to the theatrical presentation of Māori ritual practice in kapa haka. However, the majority of audiences Torotoro encountered, especially those in Edinburgh, did not have the models of pōwhiri or kapa haka with which to compare *Mika HAKA*. As such, Mokoera's martial actions (in his enactment of the coming of Te Māori) become more like a solo martial arts pattern practice with dramatic dimensions, comparable to the *iaido kata* Klens-Bigman analyses (Klens-Bigman 1999:11).

On the one hand, because Mokoera appears 'as if' he is about to fight, each audience member may become imaginatively engaged with him as his virtual combatant. At the same

time, however, they are free to sit back in the dark and watch the spectacle. Using Goffman's distinctions, the stage frame rekeys Mokoera's martial actions as indeterminably positioned somewhere between a dance – a pictographic design – and a display of grace that is the incidental by-product of his utilitarian actions (Goffman 1975:568). Overall, however, *Mika HAKA* uses the ritual martial actions of the wero to create an entertaining spectacle. The production shows how a ritualised combat display requires little adjustment to become rekeyed as dance theatre. But this statement should not be seen to indicate that the pōwhiri is a show. Mokoera's martial actions as kaiwero have a social significance that his actions in *Mika HAKA* do not.

Mokoera's actions as kaiwero derive their authority from three factors, which are (in order of necessity) his blood lineage, his martial skill, and his impressive demeanour. Firstly, he is qualified to issue the wero because of his whakapapa (Māori genealogy). Whakapapa is central to Māori cultural life. In his essay "Who Owns the Past? Change in Maori Perceptions of the Past" Tipene O'Regan explains the enduring importance of whakapapa. He says: "Traditionally, and this still has enormous force in modern Māori life, one defined oneself as a Māori person in terms of tribe. One's personal kinship network is part of oneself" (O'Regan 1993:120). Ethnographer Joan Metge, in her book *A New Maori Migration: Rural and Urban Relations in Northern New Zealand*, suggests that whakapapa gives a Māori person two things: "first, a connection with important and exciting figures and events in the classical Maori past and, secondly, a defined place in the modern Maori social world" (Metge 1964:58). Subsequent to the time of Metge's writing, whakapapa has regained political and economic significance. Today it determines who may benefit from state monies distributed to tribes in recompense for historic infringements of their property rights. Whakapapa is implicated in Mokoera's role as kaiwero on a number of levels. His familial elders select him for this role, and his challenge asserts their inherited authority over their tribal homelands. As

such, his role as kaiwero attests to his personal standing in his tribal hierarchy, and his tribes' position in an inter-tribal network. Moreover, in post-colonial New Zealand all pōwhiri might be seen to contribute to an assertion of the Māori people's collective position as the country's first settlers.

After whakapapa, the next criterion that qualifies Mokoera for his role as kaiwero is his high proficiency in Māori weaponry. Mokoera's challenge is issued to an honoured recipient who is unarmed (and largely impassive). The wero is not a fight, nor even a sparring match. It might be described as more ritual than challenge, more display than threat. As kaiwero, however, Mokoera is expected to manifest palpable violent intent; to awe the recipient of his challenge – and other onlookers – with his martial prowess. A wero that does not display such power is considered a discredit to the dignity of both hosts and visitors. The kaiwero must appear combat ready and poised to release a rain of dangerous blows – though he will not do so unless exceptional circumstances warrant. In Goffman's terms, the authority of the wero depends upon the demonstration that at its innermost layer this complexly keyed activity has potential status as untransformed reality (Goffman 1975:156). The kaiwero must demonstrate what Klens-Bigman calls "potential deadly practicality" (Klens-Bigman 2007). His wero denotes something other than that which his challenge might denote outside of the frame of pōwhiri, but his combative actions must show a tangible connection to untransformed reality.

In addition to his whakapapa and his martial skill, Mokoera is further qualified to be kaiwero because of what might be called his martial mien. Though the wero must retain an appearance of force, it is primarily a visual display. In exceptional circumstances, when pōwhiri protocol gives way to open hostility, a kaiwero might have the opportunity to demonstrate his proficiency in combat. Ordinarily, however, such events do not occur, and his spectacle alone must command respect. As such, Mokoera's physique and his quality of

movement are implicated in his role as kaiwero. In addition to his martial skills – held in abeyance – he must manifest the corporeal style of a man with martial prowess. He must imply martial potential without striking a blow. Moreover, it is important that the kaiwero is a physically arresting man, because he embodies his tribe's masculine virility.

Mokoera's enactment of the coming of Te Māori is what Goffman's calls a retransformation of a transformation (Goffman 1975:159). *Mika HAKA* rekeys the ritual martial actions of the wero as an entertaining spectacle. This rekeying might be described as a superficial replication of the wero. It inverts the hierarchy of organizational premises that substantiate this rite. In the pōwhiri it may be advantageous for the kaiwero to have an impressive and attractive physique, but it is not essential to his ritual role. Torotoro's audience in Edinburgh, however, came to *Mika HAKA* expressly to enjoy the erotic-exotic frisson that the production's publicity promised. One poster in 2003 showed a close up shot of a male dancer's thighs with the caption "Feel the Girth." Such expectations demanded that Mokoera be an exceptionally attractive figure, worthy of his aesthetic role and warranting the audience's focussed attention and ticket price.

In the stage frame of *Mika HAKA* Mokoera has little opportunity to demonstrate the tangible lethal potential that is intrinsic to the wero in pōwhiri. On the marae his martial actions are transformed: they are keyed with a symbolic value and denote something other than that which they might outside of such a frame. But the physical proximity of his weapon to the recipient of his challenge infuses the wero with an element of palpable danger. At their innermost layer his actions are seen to retain the potential to become an attack. The gap between his actions and that which they denote might be considered as slight as the gap between his weapon and the recipient of his challenge. In *Mika HAKA* this gap is expanded. The conventions of the proscenium stage distance Mokoera physically from the audience: his martial movements address them from afar. The force of his armed movements, their

potentially deadly practicality, could be seen to breach the aesthetic frame he occupies. Yet the conventions of the proscenium arch may imply that all his actions, no matter how great their force, are aesthetic and mimetic – all appearance and in some ways artificial.

Mokoera's stage presence is rendered ambiguous by the way in which it intercepts the Eurocentric tropes concerning gender, ethnicity and race that Dyer, Burt and Torgovnick discuss. His wero actions may be seen to present an affirmation of Western heteronormativity, through his boxer-like example of 'masculinity-as-activity' and his primitive aggression. There again, the frame he occupies might be seen to definitively confine his challenge, rendering him a passive figure on display, and emphasising his femininity as a natural and untamed primitive. Moreover, his commitment to sustaining the combative intensity of his martial actions in the aestheticising and eroticising dance theatre frame of *Mika HAKA* might be seen to create what Sontag calls naïve camp, in which, she says, "the essential element is seriousness that fails" augmented with the "proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate" (Sontag 1966:283).

Mokoera's role in *Mika HAKA* required him only to meet those criteria pertaining to his appearance as kaiwero. In Edinburgh this extended to matters of genealogy. Mokoera (and his fellow performers) had only to meet Eurocentric expectations of how a Māori man ought to look. His show of stereotypical Polynesian somatic traits mattered – brown skin, dark hair, marked muscularity – but the details of his whakapapa did not. Indeed, the Pasifika men of Torotoro (who also displayed such traits) successfully performed in Edinburgh in 2003 'as Māori', while a Māori company member with paler skin, who performed there in 2002, was often identified by audience members – to his vexation – as non-Māori.

As discussed below, the elision of discrete iwi identities in *Mika HAKA* positions the production in opposition to the imperatives of whakapapa that (according to Papesch) underpin kapa haka, as they do pōwhiri (Papesch 2006:36-7). As such, the successful

masquerading of Torotoro's Pasifika dancers as Māori further distances *Mika HAKA* from the tribal practices it stages. It might be argued that Torotoro's martial dance theatre is insubstantial and culturally suspect. In the production, whakapapa and martial prowess are subordinate to matters of appearance. However, the production's theatricalisation of the wero and haka can be seen to extend an aestheticisation of martial combat that the ritual frame of the pōwhiri begins. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to copy kapa haka in exploiting vulnerabilities in the frames of wero and haka that invite the rekeying of these ritual enactments of combat as entertaining theatre.

Wero and haka are ambiguously positioned betwixt instrumental activity and aesthetic activity: their agreed restraints contain violence and create instants of measured intimidation that are requests for respect. These threat displays enable the male representatives of discrete Māori groups to demonstrate to others their martial prowess without engaging them in physical combat. The formal framing of wero and haka makes a show of aggression, and positions potential opponents as performers and audience members. According to Goffman's perspective, wero and haka are not theatre: the viewers' enjoyment is not the single objective of these ritual acts (Goffman 1975:225). Yet they are performances with the kinds of pictographic intentions he ascribes to dance. Unlike the boxer – as Goffman describes him – engaged in his utilitarian tasks, the martial performers of wero and haka deliberately manage their appearance. The concerns of combative efficacy are subordinate to aesthetic considerations. Indeed, though wero and haka are constructed to sustain the vestiges of tribal militancy, these rituals might be seen to engage only in notions of such potential. Today they are customary threat displays that no longer (or extremely rarely) prelude, or truly promise, an actual attack. Their principle objective is the creation of a spectacle – albeit a spectacle with ritual significance.

In *Mika HAKA*, the spectacular value of the actions of the wero are used to present Mokoera not as the representative of his marae, but as the quintessential embodiment of Eurocentric imaginings about native warriors. To do so, the production exaggerates a symbolic value that always already pertains to the kaiwero in contemporary Māori society and New Zealand as a whole. On a rudimentary level, the kaiwero commands status in New Zealand because his expertise in Māori weaponry is rare. Māori acquisition of firearms early in the nineteenth century led to both the abandonment of traditional weapons and the escalation of intertribal conflicts, in which many warriors skilled in their use were killed.³ Many such men also died in battles with Crown forces in the latter half of that century.⁴ Indeed, by 1896 – as a consequence of these conflicts, diseases contracted from Europeans, and famine arising from population displacement – the Māori population overall had dropped to less than half of its estimated 1769 total of 100,000 (Keegan 2009). Events in the twentieth century further reduced expertise in traditional combat techniques. During World War II key men from families so skilled died in active service overseas, and during the 1950s Māori relocation to New Zealand's cities further disrupted tribal culture and eroded remaining martial skills.⁵

The kaiwero's anachronistic talents could make him a sentimental nostalgic figure, but in contemporary New Zealand society he is positioned as an icon of assertive masculinity. The potentially deadly practicality that he is seen to demonstrate makes him a figure concordant with the Western heteronormative definitions of masculinity that Burt and Dyer describe: he is active, and he is reticent (Dyer 1992:269; Burt 2006:18). What is more, his martial skills give him a special appeal – for Māori, Pākehā, and New Zealand's other settler communities – as an embodiment of the hypermasculine warrior-heroes valorised in the

³ In *Maori Warfare* Vayda pinpoints 1818 as the year in which intertribal gun battles began (Vayda 1961:147).

⁴ These conflicts, now known as the New Zealand Wars, occurred between 1845 and 1872.

⁵ This shift is explored in Metge's book *A New Maori Migration*, and is also detailed in King's *The Penguin History of New Zealand* and Walker's *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: Struggle Without End*. (Metge 1964; King 2003b; Walker 2004).

nation's oral and written histories of tribal life. Twentieth century Pākehā authors consistently describe pre-contact Māori tribal society as one in which pride motivated violent vendettas. In *The Maoris of New Zealand* Metge says reparation for slights of honour was then intrinsic to personal and collective integrity (Metge 1967:34). Elsdon Best in his monograph *Notes on the Art of War: As Conducted by the Maori of New Zealand* and Vayda in *Maori Warfare* both state that all able men were soldiers in their tribe's standing army (Best 2001:151; Vayda 1960:29). Furthermore, Best tells how children's names were often chosen to keep green for generations the pain of an insult or injury incurred in order to ensure its later revenge (Best 2001:108 & 259).

The kaiwero's enactment of his ritual challenge evokes the archetype of the Ancient Warrior recounted in such literature and his fierce resolve. The kaiwero has a contemporary denotative value in New Zealand, displayed in both pōwhiri and kapa haka, as an embodiment of an idealised masculine identity. He is positioned as a man whose martial actions bring the virility of historic tribal champions into the urban present. In many ways, he is a primitive such as Torgovnick describes: dangerous and violent, yet mystical and spiritual (Torgovnick 1990:8). The military obsolescence of the weaponry skills he demonstrates is eclipsed by their symbolic value and their contribution to his embodiment of the Ancient Warrior.

In the frames of pōwhiri and kapa haka, however, being the Ancient Warrior is not the kaiwero's attested focus. His keying as such a figure might be considered – like the boxer's grace Goffman describes – a by-product or marginal concern, an incidental consequence of his execution of the ritual acts of the wero. Contrarily, in *Mika HAKA* being the Ancient Warrior is the explicit purpose of Mokoera's performance of the actions of the wero. The production's music, lighting and script key him specifically as this sensational and ahistorical archetype. This observation might further demonstrate how *Mika HAKA* prioritises the Eurocentric imaginings of the Western audiences above all else, and the production's

opposition to the goals of kapa haka, whose theatricalisation of the wero and haka Torotoro's martial dance theatre adapts.

Dominant discourse within New Zealand suggests that kapa haka stages elements of marae ritual and concert party performance to sustain inherited Māori cultural practices – te reo in particular – for Māori benefit. This perspective is supported by the narrations of the emergence of kapa haka created by New Zealand's prominent historians, such as King and Walker. In 1929, Apirana Ngata and Te Puea Herangi convened a large gathering at Ngaruawahia, where Te Puea had established a progressive Māori community. With these people she had formed an innovative concert party who entertained with haka and songs. Their touring had raised funds for the meetinghouse whose opening was the occasion of the 1929 gathering. In his book *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: Struggle Without End* Walker says the concert party's performance at this prestigious event was well received by both the Pākehā and Māori dignitaries present, and "tribes returned home inspired to emulate what they had seen" (Walker 2001:20). King says, in his book *Nga Iwi o te Motu: 1000 Years of Maori History* that the success of Te Puea's group led to concert parties becoming an intrinsic part of marae culture, vivifying and reuniting demilitarized and disenfranchised tribal groups by gathering them in a collective task (King 2001:74).

The focus of Te Matatini is empathetic with the agenda of tribal renaissance ascribed to Ngata and Te Puea's collaboration.⁶ In "Kapa Haka" Papesch articulates the socio-political imperatives that sustain the competition:

Without specific iwi identities clearly marked (in the dance, tikanga, in protocol and so on) there can be no 'Māori nation' or at least no meaningful whole as a sum of its significant entities – not individuals, but iwi (Papesch 2006:36-7).

The Wehi family are many time champions at Te Matatini and prominent teachers of kapa haka. They describe kapa haka as offering participants a means by which to recover their

⁶ I attended Te Matatini each year from 2000 to 2006. I have also attended several regional competitions (Tamaki Makau Rau 2001 and 2003; Tainui 2003; and Manawatu 2006) and the annual Auckland High Schools kapa haka competitions each year 2001 to 2004.

connections to tribal culture. In 2001, Ngāpo Wehi (head of the Wehi family) said of kapa haka: “It’s a way of attaching yourself to your roots and being content about yourself, your past, your present situation and your future” (New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2001). In 2007 the Wehi’s stated that the mission of their Auckland school was to create “cultural ambassadors” who could give a performance of Māori cultural “authenticity” (Pounamu Performing Arts 2007).⁷ In his 1998 book *Te Mana, Te Kawanatanga: The Politics of Maori Self-Determination* Mason Durie quotes a 1996 study by the Department of Māori at Massey University (New Zealand) that states:

The concept of secure [Māori] identity rests on definite self-identification as Māori together with quantifiable involvement in, and/or knowledge of, whakapapa (ancestry), marae participation, whānau (extended family), whenua tipu (ancestral land), contact with Māori people, and Māori language (Durie 1998:58 [translation in original]).

Speaking at the University of Canterbury (New Zealand) in 2009 Papesch suggested that kapa haka, particularly for urban practitioners, has become a substitute for the marae-based activities and tribal participation listed in this report: kapa haka is their paramount source of Māori cultural identity (Papesch 2009a). Today kapa haka might be considered intrinsic to the performative construction of Māori identity. In contemporary Māori society, wero and haka are positioned as performances that crystallize the essence of a tūturu (authentic) Māori masculinity.⁸ The attributes the kaiwero and kaea display – rather than their codified martial actions themselves – contribute to the performative modelling of Māori men’s gender and ethnicity. Wero and haka, as presented both in pōwhiri and kapa haka are central to the maintenance (if not creation) of the identity they are seen to express.

The focus on pre-contact cultural precedents in kapa haka might be considered an act of cultural nationalism, reasserting Māori identity in a postcolonial era of cultural globalization. At the same time, however, it might also be seen to reflect the ways in which

⁷ I observed the work of Ngapo and Pimia Wehi on many occasions between 2000 and 2007, including performances by Te Waka Huia and Te Mana Huia – their senior and junior kapa haka groups – and Pounamu Training Systems, their school.

⁸ “tūturu: (stative) be fixed, permanent, real, true, actual” (Moorfield 2005).

interactions with what Lee might call the “oppressive and exploitative system” of New Zealand settler society have proscribed Māori a historicised native identity (Lee 2001:78). The political climate of New Zealand demands Māori sustain a close connection to their tribal history because negotiations with the government, concerning the redress of historic grievances, are predicated upon claimants’ demonstration of native title – their whakapapa. As such, Māori identity is necessarily anchored to the period when European settlement began in particular. As such, though the kapa haka that Te Matatini promotes could be seen to promote a nativist Māori cause, it could also be seen to perpetuate notions of indigeneity that are in keeping with the neocolonial agenda of New Zealand’s government. Paradoxically, however, perhaps in doing so kapa haka successfully contributes to the Māori participation in New Zealand’s political discourse, in as much that Māori find their strongest voice when addressing the Pākehā establishment through a historicised identity.

Mika HAKA might be seen as a comparable strategic staging of Māori identity, but one which foregoes the issues of tribal specificity that are pivotal to the intracultural (‘by-Māori-for-Māori’) and bicultural (Māori-Pākehā) roles of kapa haka. The production’s display of alterity is designed to captivate Western overseas audiences, whose interest in cultural authenticity is aesthetic, rather than politically driven. *Mika HAKA* deliberately exploits the ‘export’ mimetic capital value of wero and haka, or (more precisely) the value of the bodies that these racialised corporeal styles construct and present. In her article “Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic” Lee suggests that racialised corporeal styles that were once used to further cultural nationalist agendas in the USA have now become part of an “erotics of Otherness” on the American stage (Lee 2001:82-3). She suggests:

[these] racial fetishes in their new incarnations – as demonstrations of the power of colored bodies – work less to inspire audiences to social action and more to compensate for their loss of these radical energies. What is at stake is not so much whether these racialised bodies possess magic – for judging by their entry into mainstream theatre, they undoubtedly do – but whether this spectacular power has any use other than the generation of profit (Lee 2001:82-3).

To ask this question of *Mika HAKA* it is first necessary to reconsider the apparent antagonism between the production and kapa haka. The first might be described as a commercial entertainment made for non-Māori audiences, and the latter as a customary practice preserving Māori culture for Māori audiences. Yet, the cultural syncretism and emphasis on spectacle in Torotoro's martial dance theatre might position *Mika HAKA* as a continuation of a particular historical strand and contemporary dimension of kapa haka practice, rather than as the antithesis of the genre.

There is an alternative history of kapa haka that charts its development not from the Ngaruawahia gathering but from commercial entertainments staged by Māori for non-Māori tourists. The genesis of these presentations predates Ngata and Te Puea's renaissance initiatives in 1929. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Rotorua tribes performed for international visitors to their hydrothermal region. So successful was this venture that in 1910 Maggie Papakura (aka Makareti) took her concert party on an international tour to Sydney and London (Makereti 1986). The performances staged at Te Matatini might be positioned as a development of Rotorua's tourism industry. Indeed, a large number of the performers seen at Te Matatini today also perform in shows for domestic and foreign tourists in New Zealand, and for audiences overseas. Furthermore, in her 2009 conference paper, "Kapa Haka: From the Margins to the Mainstream?" Papesch drew attention to that fact that the 1972 cultural festival from which Te Matatini matured was conceived in part to raise standards in tourism entertainments (Papesch 2009b). Perhaps, Papesch suggested, the alternative history of kapa haka – as part of tourist entertainment – may have been neglected because it affords the genre a less noble origin than that implied by its birth in an epochal moment of performance at Ngaruawahia. Most importantly, whether kapa haka is seen to originate at this prestigious 1929 gathering or in Rotorua tourism, the genre as performed today integrates elements of iwi, settler and foreign cultures to form a performance practice that addresses both rural and

urban Māori audiences (with varying knowledge of te reo and marae life) and non-Māori audiences also.

In his 2007 book *Pacific Performances* Balme observes that New Zealand theatre practice is “heavily syncretic, combining indigenous Pacific performance forms and rituals within the framework of European dramaturgical conventions” (Balme 2007:192). Though kapa haka is certainly not drama it is theatre, and it might be seen to participate in the syncretic processes Balme observes. The strategies of intercultural theatre he describes in his 1996 essay “Between Separation and Integration: Intercultural Strategies in Contemporary Maori Theatre” can be observed in kapa haka. He says:

It is perhaps the twin attributes of accessibility and cultural integrity that characterize not only Maori theatre but define the special territory of intercultural theatre. For if the cultural material presented is too arcane and esoteric then it will be received by the audience as non-decodable exoticism, which is then absorbed on a purely superficial level. If, on the other hand, the indigenous cultural texts are diluted to conform exactly to the receptive codes of the non-indigenous spectator they lose that integrity which is so central to their acceptance in their own culture. Intercultural theatre at its best will find the right balance between the two poles and discover a theatrical language where the signs can be read by various cultures without forfeiting either artist or cultural integrity (Balme 1996:186).

In his 2007 book *Pacific Performances* Balme develops these ideas. He examines how indigenous Pacific performers, since their contact with Europeans, have created intercultural theatre that specifically addresses “on the one hand the colonizing majority and on the other hand, other members of the indigenous culture” (Balme 2007:15). Balme uses the word exotic in a particular way in *Pacific Performances*. In “Between Separation and Integration” he gives ‘exoticism’ negative connotations: he uses it to speak of ‘non-decodable’ performance that audiences may consider arcane, esoteric, and superficial (Balme 1996:186). In *Pacific Performances* he proposes that a performance positioned as exotic is one that has achieved “an unusual balancing act between alterity and familiarity, savagery and aesthetics,” and in doing so has become valuable mimetic capital (Balme 2007:123).

In light of Balme’s analysis, how might the genre of kapa haka and the *Mika HAKA* production be considered exotic in this latter sense? *Mika HAKA* is an intercultural

performance that uses Māori culture to address a non-Māori audience's appetite for alterity. It uses Western theatrical conventions and evokes tropes familiar to such audiences to make a comprehensible and attractive presentation of a 'different' culture. But the production elaborates precedents established by the inclusion of wero and haka in the syncretic dance theatre of kapa haka. Significantly, the syncretism of kapa haka does not only accommodate non-Māori audiences – as Balme's analysis of intercultural theatre might suggest – but it also secures the genre's popular appeal for a Māori audience too.

The cultural syncretism of kapa haka includes the use of a theatrical frame and movements, music and performance techniques originating outside of New Zealand. In kapa haka aspects of pōwhiri (including wero, haka, women's welcome calls and men's formal oratory) are transposed from their customary site to a Western stage. As elements of marae ritual these practices occur in-the-round – they are observed by participants from two or more sides. As kapa haka they are performed on a raised platform viewed from the front, in keeping with European proscenium arch conventions. Te Matatini judges may seek tribal specificity, but many groups' performances at the competition reference aspects of performance in global circulation – in particular, African-American popular song and dance, and cinematic and musical theatre choreography. For example, the women of Te Waka Huia (the Wehi's pan-tribal Auckland-based group) use a 'belting' vocal style heard in the performances of singers such as Aretha Franklin and Whitney Houston. In addition, they also use choreographic formations made famous by Hollywood film director Busby Berkley. The integration of foreign performance conventions in kapa haka is not confined to city-based groups. Waihirere, based on a rural marae in Tairāwhiti, are lauded for their commitment to tribal practices but their songs are in the style of Western light classical music. Furthermore, Te Matare i te Orehu (from Rotorua), who are expert in Māori weaponry, use elements of European military parade formations and chorus line choreography in their 'martial' displays.

Groups performing at Te Matatini include nonnative aspects in their kapa haka not necessarily to create a show of alterity for non-Māori audiences but more to address their mainly Māori audience. Though they perform to the specialist criteria of the event's judges, they also seek to entertain (and win support from) the large less-expert audience also present, and those watching the event on television. In addition to viewing kapa haka, these audiences are fans of African American popular music and movies. Indeed, they are participants in the gamut of home-entertainment available in the digital era. Balme's analysis of syncretism might be seen to neglect to consider that the boundaries determining ethnic, racial and cultural difference in New Zealand (and perhaps other Pacific nations) are blurred. Indeed, through their syncretic performance practice groups competing at Te Matatini not only participate 'in' a kapa haka competition, but they also participate in an ongoing contestation 'about' kapa haka; how inherited custom and original creativity ought or ought not to be combined to maintain the genre's role in the articulation of a distinctive, hereditary Māori ethnic and racial identity. The ways in which *Mika HAKA* exaggerates the syncretism of kapa haka might be seen to make the production, particularly when presented in New Zealand, a performance which takes this debate to a new place. Whereas it might be claimed that the cultural syncretism observable at Te Matatini is not necessarily (if at all) involved in the creation of exotic mimetic capital, in *Mika HAKA* its value to this process is made explicit.

The principal syncretic feature of *Mika HAKA* is the juxtaposition of the actions of the wero and haka with breaking. During Torotoro's performances of *Mika HAKA* in Edinburgh, in both 2002 and 2003, Taupuhi Toki was the company's principal b-boy. In *Mika HAKA* his acrobatics, mime and globalised dance vocabulary are placed in contrast with Mokoera's embodiment of the Ancient Warrior. The key aspects of Taupuhi's performance are encapsulated in a song called "I te Wā" (At this Time). A high tempo instrumental break occurs, featuring jangling guitar rifts, wailing sirens, and Cook Island log drumming. Taupuhi

and three other male dancers amble around the stage smirking, shrugging, and teasing one another – they are apparently unsure of what to do. They wear tiny kilts made of gaudy turquoise and tangerine tartan, and similarly coloured, woven plastic headbands. Mika tells the audience that because life is short one ought to live it to the full: he extols all to “Boogie!” At this cue, Taupuhi and his fellows begin a unison display of acrobatics – called ‘power moves’ by b-boys. They cartwheel to centre stage, then swivel and cartwheel once more, towards the audience. They jump into handstands, in full profile, and lower themselves chests first to the floor. The instant their feet touch down, they begin a huge spinal undulation. It seems as if their bodies have become rippling waves moving across the stage. The men rise up to balance on one shoulder and their hands. Their torsos are held horizontal above the floor, and their inverted legs are splayed akimbo. The men look at the audience and grin.

To discuss what is communicated by the meeting in *Mika HAKA* of Mokoera and Taupuhi’s performances – and their distinct corporeal styles – it is first necessary to establish the cultural position of New Zealand b-boys. In his book *Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti* Steve Hager explains how breaking began in 1976 in a New York nightclub called *Hevalo* (Hager 1984:11). DJ Herc (aka Clive Campbell) played montages of rhythmic instrumental breaks from popular songs. In response, young African American and Hispanic men took to the floor and danced solo. They competed to display “the suavest [sic], most graceful moves,” and were said to be “going off” or “burning” (Hager 1984:33). Over time, because they danced in the break, the dance became known as breaking.

Breaking came to New Zealand in the 1980s via Samoa, which at the time had greater contact with Americans and American culture (Henderson 2006). In 2000, when the creation of *Mika HAKA* began, the majority of Auckland’s b-boys were Māori and Pasifika teenagers completing high school, labouring or unemployed. Rather than dance in nightclubs, crews (cohorts of b-boys) participated in formal contests called ‘battles’, in which dancers faced-off

against one another in community halls or gymnasiums.⁹ These events were often hosted by youth development agencies and attended by audiences of Māori and Pasifika youth. In these battles individual b-boys from opposing crews took alternate turns to show off their skill. Each dancer's exhibition progressed to a climax of speed, dexterity or acrobatic dare, as he endeavoured to outshine the opposing crew by trumping their skills – spinning faster, holding an inverted pose longer, or jumping higher – or belittling them by ridiculing, ignoring or interrupting their performances. Though these b-boys battled their opponents, their performance also addressed the audience looking on. Sometimes, a b-boy strolled amongst the onlookers to elicit their support or lampoon his opponents. In battle, he might use his facial expressions or hands gestures to request applause and cheers.

Scholarly writing about Māori and Pasifika b-boys makes three main observations about their breaking: it serves as a substitute for the tribal and island cultural practices, from which they are somewhat alienated; it expresses their experience of being outsiders, to both Pākehā society and their own ethnic cultures' traditional community structures; and it communicates their identification with the experiences of African Americans. In her 1986 article "Breakdance as an Identity Marker in New Zealand" Tania Kopytko suggested that young Māori disconnected from tribal life found in breaking a "readily accessible" connection to "an international Black identity" (Kopytko 1986:26). In 2001, Tony Mitchell referenced Kopytko in his book *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* and he substantiated her analysis by quoting Māori singer Moana Maniapoto: "We don't hear enough of our own culture [...] so we co-opt the next closest thing" (Mitchell 2001:284). Kopytko and Maniapoto's perspectives merge in a statement by Māori DJ Sirvere (quoted in a 2004 youth workers' resource *The Next: An Impression of Hip-hop Expression*) who suggests: "Hip Hop is an extension of what was here before Hip Hop turned up, a way of networking, extensions

⁹ I attended such battles in Auckland from 2000 to 2005.

of the family, a tribal thing” (Saw, Tamati, and Waiti 2004:36). The authors of *The Next* also suggest that Māori and Pasifika youth identify with experiences of living “the ‘underdog’ status” that are narrated by African American hip-hop artists (Saw, Tamati, and Waiti 2004:vii). Halifu Osumare’s 2005 essay “Global Hip-Hop and the African Diaspora” expands on this kind of idea. Osumare suggests hip-hop’s international appeal demonstrates that African American life experiences resonate with those of other comparably marginalised ethnic communities (Osumare 2005:267-8). Most recently, Michael Dyson in his book *Know what I mean? Reflections on Hip-hop* suggests that communities whose hereditary lifestyles have been disturbed embrace hip-hop as a substitute “metaphorical home” (Dyson 2007:36). It reflects “the gloom and the glory” of their own indigenous culture (Dyson 2007:50). April Henderson proposes in her 2006 essay “Dancing Between Islands: Hip Hop and the Samoan Diaspora” that breaking allows New Zealand’s Māori and Pasifika youth to develop an identity distinct from that of their communities’ elders, and also Pākehā (Henderson 2006:190-1). At the same time, however, she notes that the cultural pride expressed in African American hip-hop also prompts such youth to seek reconnection to their local culture and to include hereditary performance practices in their urban street dance (Henderson 2006:193).

The inclusion of breaking in *Mika HAKA* creates a production that is ‘exotic’ in the way that Balme describes (Balme 2007:9). Breaking is the production’s familiar and aesthetic component, which counterbalances the alterity and savagery of the wero and haka. The objective of staging Māori alterity for Eurocentric audiences warranted the inclusion of non-Māori components in *Mika HAKA*. At the same time, it militated against the inclusion of elements that might dilute Tōtoro’s strange aura too far. For this reason (subsequent to the debut season of *Mika HAKA*) Māori contemporary dance was omitted from the production. Mika feared it was too akin to ballet and Western contemporary dance for a show promising

native culture.¹⁰ Yet Mika saw traditional Māori performance as too tense, linear and sombre for a Western popular audience – too ‘strange’ – and the inclusion of breaking and Pacific Island dance in Torotoro’s martial dance theatre was an attempt to resolve this impasse. In particular, the topsy-turvy acrobatics, illustrative mime, speed and fluidity of breaking contrasted with the upright stance of the wero and haka, and their ritualised rendering of combative movements as tense, staccato, codified and symbolic gestures. Breaking also gave Torotoro’s performance ‘street cred’. It is an internationally practiced dance idiom, associated globally with an alternative and fashionable youth culture. Breaking is ‘cool’, and its inclusion in *Mika HAKA* may have keyed wero and haka as part of this aesthetic.

Mika HAKA might be seen to have ‘queered’ both Mokoera and Taupuhi’s performances – both accentuating their homoerotic potential, and exposing the performativity of the traditionalist and contemporary Māori identities which their wero, haka and breaking help to construct. This keying was especially promoted by Mika’s participation in the production. Mika is the eponymous star of *Mika HAKA* and the centre point, literally and figuratively, about which Torotoro move. He wears (in order of appearance): a black and scarlet fun fur cape; a lime green, tasselled jump suit; an aquamarine PVC cloak; a tangerine tartan poncho; and an oversized, white, fluffy grass skirt. Mika’s costumes are part of his performance of ethnic and gender drag. His stage patter implicates Mokoera and Taupuhi (all of Torotoro, indeed) in his muddling of masculine and feminine gender attributes, and invests his and their performances with the “miscellaneous and contradictory” tropes that Torgovnick identifies as central to primitivist discourse (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Mokoera and Taupuhi are eroticised and exoticised through the allusions of Mika’s commentary about them, their movements, and their bodies – which are very much on display. Early in the show he describes *Mika HAKA* as Polynesian cabaret “as it should be” –

¹⁰ I refer here to conversations with Mika following the debut of *Mika HAKA* in 2001.

“Hard yet soft, gentle yet rough... and we do intend to shock.” He illustrates his words with alternating gestures of aggression and seduction, and similarly shifts his vocal tone between a gravelly bark and simpering coo. He describes Torotoro as embodiments of this duality. He equates the dancers’ with mythological beasts whose serpent tongues “flicker with love and war.” He goes on to suggest that Torotoro are part human and part creature, amorous and violent, seductive and martial.

In Edinburgh (as in New Zealand) *Mika HAKA* played to general audiences of mainly adult men and women. As such, the inclusion of male and female dancers in the production could be seen to have created a heteronormative spectacle, insomuch that the audience of men and women had men and women to view. But, Torotoro’s men outnumbered the company’s women three to one. Moreover, it is men’s bodies that are most prominently displayed in *Mika HAKA*, not women’s. The men wear less and hold centre stage more often. Moreover, the company’s unison choreography is based on wero, haka and breaking. These disciplines are dominated by male practitioners, and each can be seen to emphasise those movement qualities that dance scholar Judith Lynne Hanna identifies as archetypically masculine – “strength, directness, and weight” (Hanna 1988:217). While Torotoro’s choreography is seemingly a fit for Torotoro’s men, contrarily performance of these movements by the company’s women positions them as somewhat masculinised. Overall, *Mika HAKA* is structured as an erotic display of masculinity and men, and Mika’s queer stage presence and eroticising comments about Torotoro’s men might be seen to make *Mika HAKA* a homoerotic production. Indeed, Torotoro’s martial dance theatre furthered his eroticisation and queering of Māori masculinity, and the movement disciplines of wero, haka and breaking.

The ritual frames of the wero and haka contain the violence of their martial actions. Viewers may be frightened but they are rarely in danger on the marae, and not at all in a kapa haka performance. Wero and haka are spectacles of aggressive male movement. Insomuch as

they are arresting displays of combative male bodies, they are sensually stimulating and potentially erotic. It is this potential that *Mika HAKA* explicitly enlarges. The Western dance theatre frame of the production amplifies the aestheticisation of violence created in the intimidation displays of wero and haka. It reduces their vestigial danger and increases their sensuality. In addition, Torotoro's wero and haka were parts of a performance led by Mika whose particular subversive repetition of gender and racial norms invites an audience to enter into a sexualised interaction. His presence beside Torotoro suggested their intention to seduce and not threaten through their martial actions, and so eroticised their wero actions and haka. The rekeying of the haka presented in *Mika HAKA*, in particular, might be seen as an amplification of the movement discipline's inherent sexual charge. Haka uses gestures that are sexually suggestive, especially to audiences who do not speak te reo or understand Māori symbolism. This proposition can be explored with analysis of haka performed at Te Matatini.

Haka is a compulsory item at Te Matatini. Groups invariably present a haka taparahi – an unarmed haka. The men's physically expressive performance and bellowed chanting is supported by the women, who also call but move a lot less and stand behind the men. The presentation of haka on the Western proscenium stage used at Te Matatini creates an ambivalent tension between the male performers and the audience. The men contort their faces into fierce expressions, and percussively slap, thump and pound their own and one another's bodies, and the stage floor. But the violent potential of the men's threatening behaviour is confined to the clearly defined stage area: the audience are safe to sit back and observe. In addition, during their haka the male performers at Te Matatini move largely in unison. This might be seen to make evident that their haka is a rehearsed presentation, signalling that – however spontaneous it may appear – their fury is intentional and pre-planned. Yet the men's movements still suggest the immanence of combat, in spite of (or, perhaps, because of) the way the theatrical frame counters this possibility, and keys their

movements as gestures. The combination of the battlefield and ritual pedigree of haka makes the discipline (even on stage) seem both utilitarian and pictographic. Haka confuses the distance that Goffman's analysis of boxing and dance places between these qualities (Goffman 1975:568). Its contradictions also further Dyer's questioning of Berger's paradigm, which positions 'acting' and 'appearing' as polarities (Dyer 1992:269).

Haka at Te Matatini presents audiences with a prolonged display of near-naked male bodies in energetic action. In published discourse about these performances, however, the elemental visceral appeal, and potential eroticism, of this spectacle is ordinarily bracketed as of subsidiary importance. Expert commentary on haka focuses on how the men's movements contribute to the lyric of the haka. In his monograph *Haka! The Dance of a Noble People* Tīmoti Kāretu (quoting haka exponents Ngāpō Wehi and Kīngi Īhaka) states:

Without the word there is no haka and this is the one aspect of contemporary haka that needs serious attention [...] The language, which is fundamental to the issue, is becoming peripheral while the actions and movements, the peripheral elements, are becoming the prime focus (Kāretu 1993:83-4).

Kāretu's proposition is somewhat challenged by Nathan Mathews article "The Physicality of Maori Message Transmission," which offers a detailed examination of the extensive movement vocabulary of haka and its expressive value (Mathews 2003). He argues that physicality should be attributed greater importance in the analysis of how haka communicates.

At home and abroad, Torotoro ordinarily performed their haka to audiences who did not understand te reo at all. This practice might be seen to offer proof of Mathew's proposition that haka communicates through physicality, or serve as an example of the kind of physically oriented contemporary haka that Kāretu critiques. The trends he observes might be the result of the frequent and longstanding presentation of haka in intercultural contexts – beginning, perhaps, in Rotorua in the mid nineteenth century. In such circumstances haka become primal displays of men's invigorated bodies. What is more, these haka may be seen to

particularly communicate a message with an erotic potential, for the audience neither understands the meaning of the lyric which the form's sexualised gestures emphasise, nor such movements' symbolic values in the Māori cultural frame.

The performance of haka before a Western audience, such that Torotoro encountered in Edinburgh, creates a circumstance comparable to those described in records of 'first contact' between Europeans and Māori. Like Torotoro's Edinburgh audiences, these observers had only their own cultural frames of reference with which to understand the Māori martial displays they saw. Records indicate that they often perceived haka to have sexual connotations. Dance scholar Jennifer Shennan quotes Louis Auguste de Sainson, who visited New Zealand in the 1820s. He compared haka to "a lovers' contest," and said that it was unclear whether the performers celebrated "victory or love" (Shennan 1984:5). De Sainson's comments might be explained by Vayda's statement, in *Maori Warfare*, that pre-contact Māori tribal culture "recognized an erect penis as a sign of courage" (Vayda 1960:58).

The symbolism of the haka still intertwines sexual and violent intent. As Mathews explains in "The Physicality of Maori Message Transmission," male performers whētero (protrude their tongues) to suggest the thrusting of their penises. With this gesture the performers seek to intimidate their onlooker by declaring their potency, and their capacity to increase their numbers (Mathews 2003:15). Many haka performed today feature such codified actions, but also gestures with a similar intent that directly involve the men's genitals. At Te Matatini some groups punctuate the climax of their haka by lifting their loincloths (under which they are naked) to reveal their penis. To an audience uninformed about the centrality of whakapapa in Māori culture, or the subordination of the opponent implied by these gestures, haka might be seen as an indication of sexual intent or invitation. The transposition of haka outside of a Māori cultural context removes the meaning of its lyric and the symbolism of its gestures. This reveals what Goffman's analysis might describes as a vulnerability in the

framing conventions of haka (Goffman 1975:159). Haka is a keying of male aggressive movement that lends itself to becoming rekeyed as the kind of eroticised performance that *Mika HAKA* presents.

The rekeying of the haka (and wero) as sexualised performances in *Mika HAKA* was escalated by the production's presentation of breaking as a spectacular, fun and – most importantly – erotic dance form. During his enactment of the coming of Te Māori Mokoera performs his wero actions not to a specific individual, but to the auditorium and the audience at large. Similarly, in *Mika HAKA* Taupuhi dances his breaking facing anonymous and seated addressees, instead of an opponent peer. Through this transposition his breaking becomes dance theatre with an easy spectacular appeal, rather than a vernacular and competitive movement practice. The particular significance of Taupuhi's life as a Māori b-boy was elided, especially when Torotoro performed outside of New Zealand. He became a 'brown' breaker – an unusual exotic version of the black American b-boy, with whom UK audiences are more familiar. In addition, the specialist programme of weight lifting, 'power' yoga, acrobatics, and tai chi undertaken by Taupuhi (and all of Torotoro) during the creation of *Mika HAKA* increased his strength, flexibility and control.¹¹ He learnt to balance stock-still on his hands (fully inverted or perpendicular to the floor), execute back-flips, somersaults and diving rolls, and to precisely isolate muscle groups and joints. His breaking became more disciplined and refined – more like theatre dance than a street form.

Mika HAKA made Taupuhi's breaking into a spectacular show by placing it on an end-on-stage and by foregrounding his acrobatic and virtuosic feats, and the production emphasised the erotic potential of this display by removing his b-boy's clothes. In her essay *Breaking* Banes describes the b-boys' dance as a celebration of the "budding sexuality of the

¹¹ From 2002 to 2003, Torotoro trained with Jude Hines and Peter Nillson of The Yoga Academy (Auckland City), Aramis Rodriguez Leon of Waitakere Gymnastics Club (Waitakere City) and Ng Yeet Heang Malisa of the Chen Taiji Centre (Manukau City, South Auckland).

gangly male adolescent,” his “sexual adventures” and his “youthful male vitality” (Banes 2004:16). Māori and Pasifika b-boys usually wear several layers of baggy clothing, but in *Mika HAKA* Torotoro wore hot pants. Consequently, the erotic potential of their breaking movements was made prominent. Their inverted ‘freeze’ poses – legs splayed wide, and one hand covering the crotch – were particularly suggestive. Moreover, Mika instructed Torotoro to make eye contact with their audience and smile while performing such stunts in order to emphasise the sexual flirtation implied.

Torotoro’s participation in their self-eroticisation is the focus of this chapter’s close. Here the point of note is that just as *Mika HAKA* keys breaking as a spectacle with an erotic potential, so too the production similarly keys Mokoera’s presentation of wero actions, and the company’s performance of haka. On the one hand these ritualised martial practices are sexualised through their juxtaposition with the company’s style of breaking. This is an example of the way in which martial dance theatre rekeys martial arts movements by placing them ‘along side’ dance – in this case popular, masculinist and especially eroticised dance. As well as taking turns to present their specialist disciplines, however, Mokoera and Taupuhi (and all of the company’s men) also join together to perform haka and sections of unison breaking. In some ways, *Mika HAKA* is oriented towards de-emphasising the differences between the kaiwero and b-boy figures that Mokoera and Taupuhi embody, and the usual significance of wero, haka and breaking as crystallisations (or schema) of traditional and contemporary Māori masculinities. The movements of these divergent disciplines are pooled to become the vocabulary from which Torotoro’s choreography creates an aesthetic display of the men’s bodies – conditioned to a peak of fitness by their special training – organised to address a Western audience.

In *Mika HAKA* the contribution of wero, haka and breaking to the performative construction of specific local gendered and racialised identities is set aside. These corporeal

styles are recruited to realise a Eurocentric trope – the primitive man. They are used to develop and present Torotoro's Körper (their objective bodies): Körper detached from the distinct and specific socio-political and cultural contexts with which, says Grosz, a body is always irreducibly interlocked (Grosz 1994:19). It might be said that *Mika HAKA* exploited the exotic mimetic capital value of Torotoro's very physiques by breaking their concomitance with time and place, and focussing instead on their capacity – when so dislocated – to evoke Eurocentric fantasies and imaginings.

The male bodies that *Mika HAKA* put on display were adolescent. When Torotoro performed in Edinburgh in 2003 the eldest male dancer was eighteen and the youngest was fifteen. Samoan dancers Neli Laufoli and Mark 'Xander' Tuilaepa were both six feet tall, and all the men had marked muscularity. Yet they were still recognisably youths, a fact emphasised by their moments of playfulness on stage. They were callow teenagers with a martial mien, described by Mika as "hard yet soft, gentle yet rough." Torotoro might be compared to a central figure of Western classical art – the ephebe.

In her 1997 book *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* Abigail Solomon-Godeau contrasts the ephebe – the graceful juvenile warrior found in classical art – with another Greco-Roman ideal, the "sinewy warrior" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:45). She positions both as masculinist icons: "the feminized masculine and the masculinized masculine [...] is jointly shaped by the expulsion of femininity, the privileging of male fraternal bonds" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:139). Solomon-Godeau suggests the ephebe offered nineteenth century male spectators: "the edifying and culturally sanctioned universe of male *vertu* and beauty, but leavened, as it were, with femininity contained, interiorized, and incorporated" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:175). Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* might be seen to offer audiences a contemporary variation of this ephebe. In their youthful bodies – lacking in sinew – male and female gender attributes merge. This meeting is enhanced for Western audiences by the

dancers' exotic origin, which evokes the contradictory tropes of primitivist discourse that Torgovnick identities. Their keying as 'feminized masculine' juvenile warriors is enhanced by their primitive fusion of masculine danger and violence with feminine nature and spirituality (Torgovnick 1997:14).

Torotoro's potential likeness to classical ephebes should, however, not suggest that their performance in *Mika HAKA* necessarily affirms Western heteronormative values. The ephebe is an ambisexual figure implicated in the history of Greek pederasty. What is more, his 'feminine masculinity' is also comparable to the eroticised men displayed today in Western mass marketing. Susan Bordo notes in her 1999 essay "Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body" that despite these images' bisexual address (to female and male viewers) they are a development of "gay male aesthetics" (Bordo 1999:179). Mark Simpson reiterates this view in a 2008 *Gay Times* article saying the prevalence of such imagery has now familiarised the general public with a "worked-out, attention-hungry, proudly passive male body" whose parading was once confined to gay enclaves (Simpson 2008). Moreover, he adds that all viewers of these idealised men are invited to look at them with "the same critical, impossibly demanding, carnivorous eye that gay men had used for years" (Simpson 2008). Simpson's analysis might suggest that the homoerotic potential of the ephebe queers his every viewer. Contrarily, however, Suzanne Moore's essay in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (published in 1988, thus predating both Bordo and Simpson's comments) proposes that "the codification of men via gay discourse enables a female erotic gaze" (Moore 1988:53). Moore suggests that the aesthetic of gay imagery may be seen to offer opportunities to look at men desirously in a way that images created for a heteronormative male audience do not.

Torotoro in *Mika HAKA* might be compared to both the conservative classical ephebes that Solomon-Godeau describes and the populist adaptations of subversive gay icons that

Bordo and Simpson examine. The production's ambivalence invites and accommodates male and female gazes with diverse and intersecting motivations, ranging from aesthetic admiration to sexual desire. Martial dance theatre shows, perhaps, how displays of martial actions always already have a particular breadth of appeal. This appeal might be described using Steven Neale's description of the display of men's bodies created by action movies. In his essay "Masculinity as Spectacle" he says: "We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display" (Neale 1992:285).

The haka in *Mika HAKA* presents Torotoro's audience with a visceral display of an ephebic cohort, galvanised and unified in a vigorous celebration of their male physicality. As they present this show they stare steadily at their audience, which includes other men. They may perform their haka to command these men's admiration, but their performance does not prohibit a homoerotic gaze. Indeed, Mika's presence and patter invites such looking, and the queering of haka in *Mika HAKA* is partially effected by its inclusion in a show centred on him. It might also, however, be considered a consequence of the way in which the staging of haka, and wero, in a Western arena elaborates a potential always already inherent to haka, and perhaps wero. In their customary settings, on the marae or kapa haka stage, haka performances address men and women, and are largely keyed as ritual expressions of iwi identity. Their sexualised gestures (discussed above) are contextualised by tribal lore. Men's performance of haka to other men is ordinarily keyed as part of what Sedgwick refers to as "sanctioned" homosocial interaction (Sedgwick 1985:89). Yet, haka performances do not prohibit desirous gazing by either women or men. Moreover, the spectacle of haka – though not necessarily their lyrics – lacks any homophobic action of the kind that might check its homoerotic potential or repel a queer gaze.

The homoerotic potential of the haka in *Mika HAKA* might be seen to arise from the confusion, or opportunities, created by the disconnect between the Māori cultural frame that

Torotoro sustained when performing *Mika HAKA*, and that of their Eurocentric audiences.

Sedgwick states:

To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire', of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted (Sedgwick 1985:1-2).

In Māori culture it may be that the continuum that Sedgwick hypothesises is not as radically disrupted as it is in Eurocentric society. In *Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous People* Anton Blank, speaking biographically, suggests that Māori men's immersion from youth in homosocial physical activities means that, regardless of their sexual preference, they grow up wanting "to love men" (Hutchings and Aspin 2007:170). The distinctions between non-Māori and Māori men's sexuality must be left for discussion elsewhere. This chapter's concluding sections, however, further discusses the difference between Torotoro's cultural frame and that of their audiences (particularly pronounced in Edinburgh). This gap is central to analysis of how each parties' distinct cultural values were addressed in this meeting.

The amalgamation of wero, haka and breaking in *Mika HAKA* emphasises their elemental value for Western audiences as displays of native male bodies with an erotic potential. Their usual contribution to the articulation of divergent traditional and contemporary Māori masculinities is somewhat disregarded. At moments in *Mika HAKA*, Mokoera and Taupuhi's kaiwero and b-boy's identities, and their discrete movement vocabularies and performance motivations, appear congruous and synchronized. In the thesis' introduction I describe Torotoro's performance of "Ko te Iwi (e Kore)" (I am not of the People). The choreography of this song presents a close integration of Torotoro's movement disciplines. The combative actions of the wero and haka become rhythmical and contemporised by the up-tempo music to which they are set. Similarly, the addition of the emotive intensity of the haka to Torotoro's breaking keys it as part of their expression of Māori indigeneity. These instants of synthesis invite consideration of how wero and haka and

breaking might be seen to share intrinsic connections, being aesthetic forms expressing combative intentions.

Historians of hip-hop in the USA describe breaking as emerging from a preceding culture of inner city gang violence. Katrina Hazzard-Donald's essay "Dance in Hip-hop Culture" suggest that a b-boy's aggressive postures and gestures "contain and channel the dancer's rage" (Hazzard-Donald 2004:512). Murray Forman's essay "'Represent': Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music" describes New York crews' neighbourhoods as replicating the boundaries of preceding street gangs' 'turf' (Forman 2004:203). Banes' essay "Breaking" notes that though media portrayals have often positioned breaking as "a transfiguration of gang warfare" b-boy battles may escalate "into actual violence" (Banes 2004:15). Hager in his book *Hip Hop* similarly asserts that gangs who began breaking, also continued to fight (Hager 1984:11 & 87). Banes calls battles "aesthetically framed" combat (Banes 2004:16).

The New Zealand breaking scene from which Torotoro's b-boys came displayed little of the violent undercurrents attributed by these authors to breaking in the USA. Like today's wero and haka performers, these Māori and Pasifika b-boys were young men who performed aggressive movements more to display themselves and win kudos than to threaten others. Jacqui Malone's essay "Keep to the Rhythm and You'll Keep to Life; Meaning and Style in African American Vernacular Dance" considers how "the 'aesthetic of the cool' functions to help create an appearance of control and idiomatic effortlessness" in dance forms like breaking (Malone 1996:232). Joel Dinerstein, in his essay, "Lester Young and the Birth of Cool," proposes four aspects of the aesthetic of cool. These he describes as:

Cool the first: you control your emotions and wear a mask in the face of hostile, provocative outside-forces. Cool the second: to maintain a relaxed attitude in performance of any kind. Cool the third: to develop a unique, individual style (or sound) that communicates something of your inner spirit. Cool the fourth: to be emotionally expressive within an artistic frame of restraint (Dinerstein 1999:241).

Dinerstein further postulates:

Cool can be seen as an ideal state of balance, a calm but engaged state of mind between the emotional poles of “hot” (excited, aggressive, intense, hostile) and “cold” (unfeeling, efficient, mechanistic) – in other words, a “relaxed intensity” (Dinerstein 1999:241).

Torotoro’s martial dance theatre might be seen as an expression of adolescent male cool through an integration of Māori and African American – now globalised – performance practices. Breaking and wero and haka, perhaps all performances of martial pattern practices and intimidation displays, might be seen to fit equally into the aesthetic frame Dinerstein describes. All derive a dramatic intensity from the friction created by ‘hot’ volatile aggression contained in a ‘cold’ and controlling mesh of formality.

It might be argued, that to theorise that a common aesthetic embraces wero, haka and breaking is to ignore the interlocking of specific bodies and corporeal styles with specific cultural contexts, which Grosz emphasises (Grosz 1994:34). The choreographic synthesis of “Ko te Iwi” may support the analysis that Torotoro’s martial dance theatre is a hybrid expression of cool, but the episodic choreographic structure of “Hongi” (meaning ‘to press noses in greeting’) demonstrates how *Mika HAKA* at times exposes the tensions inherent in the meeting of the kaiwero and b-boy’s corporeal styles, which belong to distinct cultural contexts.

The wero and haka are expressions of specific whakapapa – a vertical lineage and hierarchy. They are executed, in pōwhiri and kapa haka, at the behest of the performers’ elders. Contrastingly, Māori and Pasifika b-boys ‘represent’ varied horizontal allegiances with which they choose to identify – including their crew and local b-boy peers, their neighbourhoods, their ethnic communities and b-boys in the USA and other foreign nations. The juxtaposition of Mokoera as kaiwero and Taupuhi as the Māori b-boy brings together two distinctly different figures that express fundamentally different definitions of ‘belonging’. In Papesch’s analysis, Māori performance is all about sustaining the specificities of iwi culture on stage as on the marae (Papesch 2006:36-7). The Māori b-boy’s adoption of breaking

indicates his self-identification as part of what Osumare calls the “*connective marginalities*” to which all disadvantaged peoples might be seen to belong (Osumare 2005:267 [italics in original]).

“Hongi” begins with Torotoro (wearing lime green flares) grouped upstage in a triangular phalanx. Mokoera is at the front. In unison, they throw their heads back and grasp imaginary weapons from the sky. These they lower before their chests. They advance. With each step they shout and snap their heads from side to side, glaring at the audience. The company suddenly breaks rank and exits. Mokoera is alone. He spins on the spot and drops to his knees. As he hits the floor, Taupuhi and Neli come running from opposite directions and leap over him. Mokoera watches the b-boys begin to dance, then exits.

Smiling and laughing, Taupuhi and Neli hop from foot to foot, swinging their relaxed limbs casually. Neli invites the audience to clap along. Suddenly, Taupuhi swipes at him. Neli ducks and Taupuhi jumps into a handstand. Neli swings him in the air (it is a lift seen in rock and roll jiving). Taupuhi lands in the stance of a sagging marionette, and Neli tugs his imaginary ‘strings’ to make him dance. He blows into Taupuhi’s fingertips and triggers an undulation that courses down Taupuhi’s arm and into his spine. Neli then exits as Mika enters, singing of “Polynesian pop-stars with New York abs.” Taupuhi begins a kaleidoscopic solo. He mimes hanging himself and then plucks out his heart, which he throws like a hand grenade at his peers who are watching him, sending each man reeling into the wings. Despite the violence implied Taupuhi’s performance is jovial.

Further into “Hongi,” long sustained chords replace the jaunty melody. Mokoera re-enters and performs a truncated version of his enactment of the coming of Te Māori. He shakes his spear in abrupt bursts as he moves down the centre of the stage. He jumps from side to side, swinging his weapon in arcs about his body. He then stabs it high into the air, and gestures the other dancers to join him on stage, whom he then leads in a haka. In a wide, low

stance Torotoro thrust their clawed hands directly out towards the audience. Flinging their arms from side to side they cut the air with blade like hands.

Torotoro's juxtaposition of the kaiwero and the b-boy's movement vocabularies implicates *Mika HAKA* in a contestation between historicised local and contemporary global definitions of Māori masculine identity. Participation in wero and haka represents commitment to the continuity of tribal heritage and perpetuates the warrior figure as the quintessence of Māori masculinity. Contrastingly, the b-boy dances a foreign form that suggests cultural connections linking the marginalised culture of New Zealand's Māori and Pasifika communities with that of African Americans, and other diaspora and dispossessed and disenfranchised peoples. In this way, Torotoro's martial dance theatre, in songs such as "Ko Te Iwi," could be seen to present the company's male dancers as both distinctly Māori and internationally affiliated. "Hongi," however, shows how the cultural syncretism of *Mika HAKA* might also be seen to decontextualise and confuse the corporeal styles that sustain the performative identities of both the kaiwero and b-boy (as presented by Mokoera and Taupuhi). The production might be seen to destabilise the very identities it apparently seeks to unite and celebrate. This outcome is a consequence of the production's somewhat divergent intentions.

On the one hand, Torotoro's integration of Māori and foreign modes of performance in *Mika HAKA* expresses their cosmopolitan urban life experiences. At the same time, however, the production manipulates this 'natural' cultural syncretism to exploit its exotic mimetic capital value. As such the production might be seen as an example of how contemporary martial dance theatre frames and formalises unique convergences of movement disciplines already occurring in the performers' homelands. *Mika HAKA* also invites consideration of how the genre might be seen to indeterminably disrupt or indulge Eurocentric stereotypes. It may be seen to present on stage what Lee describes as a "radical"

racialised corporeal style with a revolutionary potential, or a display of fantasy bodies with an exotic-erotic value created and marketed in the service of “oppressive and exploitative systems” (Lee 2001:78).

In *Mika HAKA* the integrity of the identities of the kaiwero and b-boy – as embodied by Mokoera and Taupuhi – are destabilised in a number of ways. Torotoro’s martial dance theatre theatricalises wero, haka and breaking, to create the exotic-erotic personae of the Ancient Warrior and Brown B-Boy. This rekeying of these movement disciplines might be seen as a subversive (or ‘wrong’) iteration of the kaiwero and Māori b-boy’s corporeal styles. Torotoro’s performance of these movement forms on stage reveals their ordinarily concealed contribution to the construction of traditional and contemporary Māori masculinities. It invites comparison of these performative identities to theatrical performances. In addition, Torotoro’s juxtaposition of the kaiwero and b-boy’s identities disturbs the integrity of each. Their performance of traditional Māori martial displays alongside breaking undermines this foreign form’s capacity to express a Māori identity. Mokoera’s wero actions and the company’s haka implicates Torotoro’s martial dance theatre in the affirmation of Māori peoples ‘first nation’ status. Their breaking, however, might suggest a disconnection from this cause. It might imply the dancers’ identification of themselves as a diaspora, like African Americans, or the neo-colonial impact of the USA’s culture on New Zealand. Inversely, however, the presentation of the b-boy’s blatant showmanship alongside the martial ritual actions of the kaiwero might be seen to further Torotoro’s exposure of theatricality of this figure, and the performativity of this traditional Māori identity. The breaking in *Mika HAKA* plays with aggression: in “Hongi” Taupuhi swings for Neli with no martial intent at all – it’s just for fun. The proximity of this play-acting to Mokoera’s wero actions and the company’s haka rekeys them as similarly pictographic ‘shows’.

Moreover, the Western dance theatre frame limits both the kaiwero and b-boy's capacity to demonstrate the vestigial combative potential that validates their antagonistic challenges in pōwhiri and the breaking battle. The theatrical frame of *Mika HAKA* widens the gap, which ordinarily exists, between their combative actions and that which these actions denote. It removes the threat from their performance. Both are rekyed as wholly spectacular figures. Whereas the kaiwero and b-boy's bodily displays are ordinarily seen as assertive expressions of the dignity and prowess of their tribe or crew, in *Mika HAKA* emphasis falls, instead, on their latent, and perhaps disavowed, value as erotic and exotic exhibitions.

When performing the wero or haka in *Mika HAKA*, Torotoro act 'as if' they are tribal representatives and 'as if' their audience are appropriate correspondents. Similarly, when performing their breaking, they address their audiences as they might address a crew of rival b-boys in a battle. But these exchanges are not equivalent to those of the pōwhiri or the battle. Torotoro face ticket-holders whose only response to the dancers' invitations to engage is their gaze. *Mika HAKA* is a theatre performance, in which Torotoro became objects of display for an anonymous audience's delight. The Western dance theatre frame of Torotoro's martial dance theatre can be seen to place all emphasis on the immediate spectacular appeal of the wero, haka and breaking – their value as visceral, elemental and erotic displays with an intercultural appeal. Indeed, in *Mika HAKA* Mokoera and Taupuhi might not be seen to be 'doing' anything – there is no challenge or battle – and consequently may not present a display of activity of the kind that Dyer says may affirm a (Western) man's masculinity (Dyer 1992:269).

The conflation of the kaiwero and b-boy's identities and corporeal styles in *Mika HAKA* may express the 'natural' cultural syncretism (and confusions) of Torotoro's urban life experiences, but it also makes the performance an exotic work in the terms that Balme defines. Torotoro's martial dance theatre can be seen to offer Western audiences an accessible

fusion of the strange savagery of wero and haka with the familiar aesthetic of breaking (Balme 2007:9). Moreover, each figure contributes to the productions incarnation of a range of long established Eurocentric Othering tropes concerning Māori identity. This proposition can be analysed by examining how Torotoro's performance of "Ko te Iwi" embodies the stereotypes about Māori men that New Zealand historian James Belich catalogued in a survey of European settlers' writings discussed in his 1994 lecture series "Race and New Zealand: Some Social History of Ideas." The typifications Belich lists might be seen as specific examples of the contradictory tropes of primitivist discourse that Torgovnick examines, and in particular the way in which such figures express "a dialectic between, on the one hand, a loathing and demonizing of certain rejected parts of the Western self, and on the other, the urge to reclaim them" (Torgovnick 1997:8).

Belich labels four of the typifications of Māori that he finds with the colours red, black, brown and white. The appearance of these figures in *Mika HAKA* can be compared to their manifestation in other contemporary public portrayals of Māori men, and the production might be seen to be participant in an ongoing mythologizing of Māori masculinity by Māori and non-Māori. "Ko te Iwi" embodies the Red, Black, Brown and White stereotypes to differing degrees, and also, perhaps, with differing degrees of intentionality. Analysis of this one song leads to a wider consideration of the ways in which *Mika HAKA* – and kapa haka – might be seen to contribute to a strategic or parodic reiteration of Eurocentric tropes concerning Māori, or the substantiation of what Lee calls "racist ideologies disguised as 'natural' or 'biological' hierarchies of difference" (Lee 2001:72).

Belich's 'Red Māori' is a stereotype that promotes conceptions of the Maori race as "inherently war-like, its menfolk natural warriors" (Belich 1994:18). Drawing on the "myth of Martial races" it seeks, he says, to ennoble Māori as "Conan-like barbarians" (Belich 1994:18). The Red Māori ideal might be seen to persist today through contemporary lionising

of Māori sportsmen. Hokowhitu in his journal article “Race Tactics: The Racialised Athletic Body” discusses how New Zealand culture directs Māori men towards sports participation, and how media rhetoric assigns such men with an apparently innate volatile power and a patina of national glory (Hokowhitu 2003). This conflation was the central conceit of the 1999 Adidas advert (discussed in this thesis’ introduction) whose mingling of footage of a rugby team and re-enactment of a battlefield haka keyed contemporary sportsmen as Māori tribal warriors. In “Ko Te Iwi,” Torotoro evoke notions of the Red Māori through a similar juxtaposition of athletic and martial prowess. The dancers – wearing minimal costumes to show off their physiques – perform actions that indicate combative intent. While Mika’s declamations urge them to “retain your personal sovereignty” the dancers march forwards, and the bold glare with which they fix the audience suggests a statement of militant pride.

Behind the Red Māori Belich spies a shadow figure whom he identifies as the bestial ‘Black Māori’, ruled by primal “passions” (Belich 1994:27). These “Black savages,” says Belich, are assigned innumerable “unsophisticated vices and disabilities,” rendering them “less human and more animal than their exact opposite, the civilised European” (Belich 1994:14). This Black stereotype of Māori gained global renown through the film version of Alan Duff’s novel *Once Were Warriors*, whose violent antihero Jake ‘the Muss’ Heke exemplifies Duff’s theories about Māori people’s self-perpetuation of their under privilege (Duff 1990; Tamahori 1994). The excitement offered by the savagery and violence associated with the Black Māori made this figure a fit for *Mika HAKA*. It promised an arresting spectacle and seeded a number of Torotoro’s choreographic motifs. For example, mid way through “Ko te Iwi,” Torotoro release their rigid postures. They roll their heads and twist their flexed arms and clawed hands in writhing circles. Their eyes flare, and the whites show around their pupils. Their retracted lips reveal clenched teeth. Becoming somewhat chaotic, they slip

towards an explosion – regaining focus just before it seizes them. This momentary paroxysm suggests both anger and a kind of ecstatic abandon.

Belich's 'White Māori' is an indigene 'civilised' through religious "conversion, Europeanization, or [social] assimilation" (Belich 1994:32). Belich finds that non-Maori writers have often proposed 'Whitening' as the only route for Māori after the supposed moment of "Fatal Impact," when their native world order began its inexorable slide into extinction before the colonialists' 'superior' culture (Belich 1994:32). The elimination of Western contemporary dance from *Mika HAKA* (subsequent to the show's debut run) might be seen as an attempt to exclude 'Whiteness' from Torotoro's martial dance theatre. But Belich gives the White Māori a close cousin he calls 'Brown Māori' whom he describes as a "servant, faithful and true, but not too bright, [a] clown," held in "affectionate contempt or contemptuous affection" by non-Māori (Belich 1994:20). Though the choreography of *Mika HAKA* may eschew White dance vocabulary, the show's moments of burlesque might be seen to promote 'Brownness'. For example, during the rhythmic interlude in the middle of "Ko te Iwi," Torotoro suspend the combative challenge implied in their performance. Instead, they shake their shoulders to shimmy their pectoral muscles, and jerk their hips to waggle their buttocks. These frivolous gestures, and the dancers' big smiles, are a peculiar contrast to the song's messages about personal sovereignty, and their embodiments of the militant Red and primal Black Māori: the Red and Black became somewhat Brown. The degree of comment implied by Torotoro through this switch becomes the key question. How might their Brownness be seen as a witting satirical ploy undercutting their Red persona? Or is it rather one of a number of personae adopted merely to satisfy the exotic-erotic expectations of their Western audiences?

Mika HAKA was structured to objectify Torotoro in such a way that might gratify a Eurocentric gaze. The dancers were selected for their attractive and identifiably Polynesian

bodies. As such, Torotoro's martial dance theatre might be seen to have promoted a reductive generalisation and objectification of Māori (and Pasifika) identity that might be considered a continuation of colonial imperatives. Certainly, the company's processes of casting and performance were not guided by the particularities of tribal affiliation which Papesch identifies as the factor that authenticates kapa haka as a valid expression of Māori identity (Papesch 2006:37). Torotoro operated without tribal affiliation, uniting simply as 'Māori'.

In *Te Mana* Durie acknowledges that a unified Māori identity has enabled tribes to emphasise "their common features" in order to better deal with the alien culture of European settlers, but, nevertheless, he sees this pan-tribal construct as largely driven by colonial policies and missionary activity (Durie 1998:53-4). On the one hand, the preservation of specific tribal identities through kapa haka could be seen to counter this process. However – as discussed above – because tribal identity is substantiated by recourse to ancient precedent it may also be seen as form of indigenous nostalgia, in some ways complicit with continuing colonialism. Most people of Māori descent now live in urban contexts, and kapa haka might be seen to seek to contribute to the concretising of these modern citizens as historicised natives, fixed as Other in a curatorial colonial gaze.

In *Pacific Performances* Balme speaks of how traditional performance – especially that created for presentation to foreign audiences – often engages in a temporal 'freezing' which suggests that quintessence of the culture being staged is located in the past and not the present. Balme connects this phenomena to James Clifford's "salvage paradigm," through which certain schools of ethnography "desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change" (Balme 2007:186). Balme also considers how such cultural freezing might be seen as part of the 'invention of tradition':

According to this thesis, varied in different nuances by MacCannell, Culler, Urry, and Frow, the condition of alienation constitutive of modernity [...] has bred as its antithesis the 'invention of tradition' and the increasing priority placed on authenticity in objects, peoples and places apparently located outside the realm of modernity (Balme 2007:187).

At points in *Mika HAKA*, Torotoro's martial dance theatre presents the dancers as what Belich calls "Frozen Maori, locked into immutable tradition" (Belich 1994:26). *Mika*'s patter describes the dancers as heirs to an ancient and unbroken cultural continuum. The production exploits the theatrical impact and romantic appeal of this figure for non-Māori audiences. Overall, however, Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* does not sustain this or any other singular stereotype of Māori. Their breaking counters their 'Frozen Māori' persona. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to deliberately play with the mechanisms and stereotypes that lead to the Othering of Māori, subverting the typifications of cultural difference it invokes, and exploiting the mimetic capital value of these identities to their own ends.

Mika HAKA is a rekeying of the theatrical staging of the wero and haka presented in kapa haka. Whereas kapa haka is seen to stage and preserve inherited Māori culture for Māori benefit, *Mika HAKA* maximises on the appeal of these martial practices for non-Māori Western audiences. In this way, *Mika HAKA* constructs sensational images of Māori men by elaborating upon three largely disavowed aspects of kapa haka: the presentation of Māori performers as Other to New Zealand's European settlers; the use of cultural syncretism to create a performance that communicates across this stated cultural divide (and cultural differences within Māori society today); and the potentially (homo)erotic display of the male Māori body that is created by the haka. By exaggerating these aspects, *Mika HAKA* might be seen to expose how this traditional performance practice – and the martial masculinity it promotes – is a form of exotic-erotic mimetic capital shaped through intercultural interactions, rather than a spontaneous and unchanging expression of Māori indigenous identity.

Donohue suggests that socio-political changes in Japan have led to a series of reinterpretations of the Japanese martial arts and the formation of today's *budo* (Donohue 1997:12). It might be argued that the performance of wero and haka as a staging of Māori

alterity, evident in both kapa haka and *Mika HAKA*, is a specific consequence of New Zealand's bicultural societal order. Though it is fifteen years since Belich gave his lectures, and longer still since the texts he referenced were written, the manifestation in *Mika HAKA* of the typifications he identifies is indicative of the endurance in New Zealand of such constructs concerning Māori people. The country's population is becoming increasingly multicultural, but Pākehā predominantly occupy positions of power. And while, governmental policies and legislation acknowledge customary rights and titles and promote pro-Māori discrimination, in toto the national culture sustains a Māori-Pākehā binary. In daily life, this division can be seen to encourage articulations of ethnicity in which essentialist typifications of Māori identity readily arise, based on somatic markers such as skin-difference or the bold, unique and hereditary corporeal styles of the wero and haka. New Zealand's particular societal order defines Māori as Other to Pākehā. Torgovnick says:

the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it. It is our ventriloquist's dummy – or so we like to think (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Pākehā do not ventriloquise Māori, but Pākehā values dominate in New Zealand and set parameters that reward Māori for 'speaking' in certain ways. The resources that are granted to Te Matatini are part of continuing history in which Pākehā prescribe Māori a limited cultural forum, support for which continues to be largely dependent upon Māori statement of their cultural difference from the settler community. The ways in which *Mika HAKA* exploits the exotic mimetic capital value of wero and haka are an international extension of a longstanding domestic trading of these practices.

It might be argued that the extant Māori culture, that kapa haka is seen to uphold and *Mika HAKA* subverts, is itself a reactive construct arising from biculturalism. Ngahuia Te Awekotoku is a Māori lesbian feminist who has particularly questioned the origin of modern indigenous gender roles, such as the hypermasculine Ancient Warrior discussed above. In her

1991 collection of essays *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics*, she urged Māori to “reconstruct tradition, reinterpret the oral history of this land, so skilfully manipulated by the crusading heterosexism of the missionary ethic” (Te Awekotuku 1991:37). Apirana Ngata (who, in contrast to Te Awekotuku, is an establishment figure) also voiced the conception of Māori culture as a post-colonial construct. In *The Maoris of New Zealand*, Metge quotes Ngata's definition of the exoteric function of Māoritanga (Māori culture) as “the continuous attempt to interpret the Māori point of view to the Pākehā in power” (Metge 1967:59). In this light, Torotoro's innovative use of wero and haka in their martial dance theatre might be seen as a continuation of their present-day use on marae and kapa haka stages. In such frames, though positioned as preservations of the past, in part these practices are always already forms of contemporary expression. It is this dimension of wero and haka that *Mika HAKA* emphasises above all.

Participating in *Mika HAKA* can be seen to have engaged Torotoro in a process of self-exoticisation, because the allure of their difference from non-Māori audiences was the principal focus of their martial dance theatre. Indeed, their martial dance theatre might be seen as the vehicle through which Mika endeavoured to teach them his use of self-exoticising and self-eroticising performance as a means of self-empowerment. In particular, Mika can be seen to have encouraged Torotoro to indulge Eurocentric erotic fantasies about exotic natives. Torotoro's performance as such figures might be considered an example of the self-minstrelsy Sieg describes in *Ethnic Drag*. Such a performance, says Sieg, may challenge the racist tropes it evokes through “the insertion of a critical (and comic) distance between the actor and her roles, in order to denaturalize and historicise them” (Sieg 2002:202). It might be suggested that Torotoro, unlike Mika, lacked the life experience to perform with such a distance. Consequently their performance in *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have entrenched racial typifications, by replicating them without comment.

The ironic distance evident in Mika's self-presentation might be considered a consequence of him growing up as a flamboyant gay Māori boy in a suburban Pākehā family. Mika was adopted at birth by a Pākehā couple who lived in a predominantly Pākehā town. Till he was eighteen his principle contact with Māori culture was through representations of Māori targeted at non-Māori viewers – materials comparable to the Adidas advert discussed in the thesis' introduction.¹² Mika has not visited his birth father's marae and he lives and works without a specific tribal affiliation. Mika stands outside of usual Māori hierarchies and has no elders to whom he is obliged to defer when creating his representations of Māori culture. This made him the sole authority under which Torotoro worked when performing *Mika HAKA*.

On the one hand, Mika's adoption separated him from marae life and tribal culture, but at the same time his dark skin invited people to identify him as Māori and not Pākehā. In addition, his homosexuality further distanced him from the heteronormative orders of both Māori and Pākehā society. Mika's persona in *Mika HAKA* was the product of a twenty-year performing career that staged, and largely celebrated, his experiences of not belonging and of always being the Other. *Mika HAKA* invited Torotoro to join Mika in this project, and the creation of stage personae similarly keyed.

Mika's stage persona queers both his gender and ethnicity. He presents male and female, and Māori and non-Māori attributes. This kind of mixture can also be seen in Torotoro's martial dance theatre. In *Mika HAKA* Torotoro do not present as gay (as Mika always does) but like his performance their martial dance theatre subverts the Eurocentric norms of gender. The martial component of their performance might be considered affirming of their heteronormativity, keying them as figures representing the ideal of 'masculinity-as-activity' that Dyer describes (Dyer 1992:269). But at the same time when performing in a

¹² I make reference here to interviews conducted with Mika in 2007 (Mika 2007), and his auto-biographical statements "Growing up Gay" and "He iti taku iti" (Mika 1996; Gudsell 1998).

Western arena, like all male dancers, their role as figures on display in an explicitly aesthetic frame may somewhat counter this affirmation, keying them as passive and feminised. The productions evocation of Western primitivist discourse further complicates the issue of gender, potentially keying the men as violent and dangerous (archetypically masculine) and natural and spiritual (archetypically feminine). In addition, the meeting of the kaiwero and b-boy, and the juxtaposition and partial integration of their wero, haka and breaking movement vocabularies, might be seen to have created a performance that is both Māori and African American or globalised.

Mika HAKA implicated Torotoro in Mika's exploration of his identity – including his gender, ethnicity, and race – through international performance. His solo career exploited the intercultural appeal of his queer and Māori identity, but it also provided him with an arena in which to evolve this particular identity. In this way, Mika's cabaret career demonstrated how intercultural relations might offer opportunities in which to develop idiosyncratic, contemporary ethnic identities. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have offered Torotoro a similar opportunity to revise their cultural identities. Indeed, their performance is comparable to that of Māori (and Pasifika) b-boys. Henderson observes that hip-hop is used by Māori and Pasifika youth in New Zealand to express their ethnicity in ways other than those that they have inherited (Henderson 2006:193). Similarly, Torotoro's martial dance theatre presents them as youth participating in present day continuations of pre-contact tribal (and island) culture, but also developing new expressions of their ethnicity. Furthermore, *Mika HAKA* specifically involved Torotoro's dancers in expressions of their individualism – an idea intrinsic to the culture of b-boys.

Mika's interweaving of gender and cultural drag in his solo cabaret played with the hiding and revealing of his Māori masculine identity beneath a veneer of adopted Western femininity. His subversive reiteration of Western female identity may have invited audiences

to consider his Māori masculinity as a comparably adopted corporeal style. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have implicated Torotoro in a similar process of subversive cultural drag. The production keyed their wero actions, haka and breaking as erotic displays of male bodies and aesthetic exhibitions of masculine gender attributes. Their martial dance theatre may have invited their audiences to consider how these movement practices, even in their customary contexts, facilitate performances of gender and ethnicity – and perhaps to consider how they create the identities they are seen to express. This potential, however, is subsidiary to the immediate impact of Torotoro’s martial dance theatre. *Mika HAKA* invites racial fetishism, in both of the senses Lee considers in “Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic.” The production commodifies the performer’s corporeality by welcoming Western audiences’ desirous fantasies. It evokes Eurocentric tropes (active in the popular Western imagination) about the exotic figure of the ‘native’ man. The production encourages xenophilia.

Torotoro’s martial dance theatre offered Edinburgh audiences a visceral and often sexualised display of alterity. It used the kaiwero and the b-boy’s performances to engage with essentialist ideas that an Edinburgh audience might have about young Māori men, and their fantasies about native epebes in particular. Whereas kapa haka sites its performers in the continuum of specific tribal history, *Mika HAKA* exploited the capital value of Torotoro’s bodies. In particular, their bodies’ potential, through the integration of martial movement and dance, to perform the fictions woven about Maori by non-Māori.

In “Ethnic Drag” Sieg considers the risks of self-minstrelsy: “Does not the actor’s body risk lending corporeal proof to images believed to be accurate?” (Sieg 2002:222). On the one hand, Torotoro’s reinterpretation of wero and haka as exotic performances creates mimetic capital that furthers their careers. Yet their martial dance theatre may also be seen to replicate a colonialist framing of their cultural identities, without necessarily subverting or co-opting such figures to nativist interests. A similar observation might be made about other

performances of Māori alterity, such as Māori performance for tourists, and perhaps kapa haka.

In “Between Separation and Integration” Balme suggests that the cultural integrity of intercultural performers need not be forfeited in their creation of performance for audiences belonging to other cultures (Balme 1996:182). Māori art historian Hirini Moko Mead, however, suggests ways in which intercultural interactions might have reshaped Māori artistic expression detrimentally. His 1993 essay “Ngā Timunga me ngā Paringa o te Mana Māori” (The Ebb and Flow of Mana Māori and the Changing Context of Māori Art) he suggests that some Rotorua carvers have become beholden to the wants and demands of the non-Māori tourists who are their principal customers (Mead 1993:208). Furthermore, in his 1986 essay “Magnificent Te Māori: Te Māori Whakahirahira: He Korero Whakanui i Te Māori,” Mead says the Te Maori touring exhibition of Māori carvings may have fascinated visitors in America, but proposes that such a display of cultural strangeness may overwhelm and merely elicit superficial “Gee whiz!” responses (Mead 1986:79).

Mead’s comments might be applied to an analysis of kapa haka. The genre evolved in part from entertainment for non-Māori tourists, and continues to be often presented to non-Māori audiences. The ritual martial actions of wero and haka when performed for such audiences may also largely evoke the superficial ‘Gee whiz!’ response Mead describes. They become the means to an elemental display of men’s invigorated bodies, the sight of which the audience is invited to enjoy. Is this perhaps an example of “a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’” and a frivolous rekeying of the serious that Sontag describes in her “Notes on Camp” (Sontag 1966:287)? Where kapa haka is seen to rekey a threat as a thrill it might be deemed “naïve Camp” – “seriousness that fails” (Sontag 1966:282-3). *Mika HAKA* invites this very possibility, and the production may be seen to key Totororo’s martial dance theatre as “deliberate camp” (Sontag 1966:282).

Te Awēkotuku analysis of presentations of Māori culture for non-Māori runs counter to Mead's. R. T. Mahuta's 1987 report "Tourism and Culture: The Māori Case" quotes Te Awēkotuku's doctoral thesis, "The Sociocultural Impact of Tourism on the Te Arawa People of Rotorua, New Zealand" (Te Awēkotuku 1981). The report suggests that tourist appetites for demonstration of cultural differences may have created an economic incentive that has enabled Rotorua tribes to sustain their Māori tribal identity (Mahuta 1987:8). In this respect the theatrical images of Otherness created by Torotoro's martial dance theatre might be compared to the performances of indigeneity Dean MacCannell describes in his book *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers*. MacCannell says the frame of tourism encourages native peoples to present a frozen culture (MacCannell 1992:168). It keys non-Western peoples as "ex-primitives" enlisted "to play the part of primitive-for-moderns" (MacCannell 1992:34). But though they might be viewed as "volunteering to be exploited," MacCannell suggests that their playing of the Other has a strategic value (MacCannell 1992:168). He references Michael Hechter's study of British Celtic identity to suggest that a disadvantaged ethnic group gains leverage in their dealings with a dominant culture by emphasizing those attributes that distinguish them from this group (MacCannell 1992:167). James Clifford also explores this idea in his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Clifford says that the "performance of culture and tradition" commodifies local expressions of identity, but is also a vehicle which gives those performing access to "a wider public sphere" (Clifford 1997:200). In light of these arguments, Torotoro's martial dance theatre might be seen as both contributing to new contemporary elaborations of Māori identity and accommodating, and consequently entrenching, Eurocentric primitivist discourse. In *Mika HAKA* there is a possible convergence of the polarities Lee defines when she distinguishes "optimistic possibilities for racial performance" from "punitively regulated cultural fictions" (Lee 2001:72).

It might be suggested, however, that Torotoro's performance lacked the critical (and comic) distance which, according to Sieg's analysis, may enable gender and cultural drag, like that which Mika performs, to denaturalize and historicise the essentialist tropes it evokes (Sieg 2002:222). Mika's Māori stage persona is a construct developed in dialogue with non-Māori; his theatrical performances accommodate their expectations about his ethnicity (Mika 2007). Mika's embodiment of the ethnically Other is inflected with an understanding of "the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous," which Meyer says is central to queer parody (Meyer 1994:2-3). In *Pacific Performances* Balme says: "Tourist encounters with indigenous cultures are framed in an unstable equilibrium poised between the desire for authenticity on the one hand and the demands of commodification and consumerism on the other" (Balme 2007:17). Mika's self-exoticising might be seen to address his Western audiences need for palatable difference. *Mika HAKA* was created to exploit his understanding that the Eurocentric taste for the 'authentic' is quite distinct from what a Māori audience might consider tūturu.

Torotoro, however, might be said to have lacked the propensity to deliberately objectify their selves in the way that Mika modelled. In 2003, when Torotoro performed in Edinburgh, their average age was eighteen and before touring with *Mika HAKA* the dancers had had little experience of interacting outside of Māori or Pasifika society. In addition, they all identified as heterosexual. Though Torotoro were not sophisticates versed in strategic subversion or the reclamation of stereotypes, neither could it be said, however, that they were unaware of how Māori and Pasifika people might be objectified before a Eurocentric gaze. In their daily lives in New Zealand these dancers navigated the kinds of racial stereotyping described by Belich. It would be a simplification to suggest that Torotoro's martial dance theatre disempowered these dancers by requiring them to 'drag' their identities in a manner they could not fully comprehend. Rather, Torotoro, as a collective of young indigenous

dancers, and *Mika HAKA* – Mika's international commercial theatre production – might be seen to have operated according to different but complementary agendas. The focus of *Mika HAKA* was global; Torotoro's was domestic. The meeting of these concerns shaped the company's particular version of martial dance theatre, and the ambiguous engagement with Eurocentric racial tropes that characterises *Mika HAKA*.

Mika HAKA was created to exploit international market demand for staged versions of the Māori martial arts as a performance of Otherness. Through participating in the production Torotoro gained income, travel opportunities and an on-the-job performance education. In addition, the holistic rehearsal process through which they developed their martial dance theatre personae provided them with opportunities to explore pressing issues of identity that tensioned their daily lives in New Zealand. These issues included the relationships between urban and rural Māori, and Māori and Pasifika people, and vernacular contestations circulating in all of these communities regarding ideas of cultural authenticity. In *Mika HAKA*, while Torotoro played the exotic Other overseas for Western audiences' entertainment, their martial dance theatre also provided them with opportunities to explore these local issues. It might be said that while Torotoro were immersed in exploring the inconsistencies that destabilised their space of belonging, Mika was settled in a space of Otherness, from which he formulated his identity and the *Mika HAKA* production.

Furthermore, rather than being a deliberate construction facilitating a performance of alterity, the cultural syncretism of *Mika HAKA* might be seen as a unique expression of the socio-cultural context in which Torotoro lived. Their martial dance theatre, while meeting the commercial objectives of *Mika HAKA*, furthered Mika's disturbance of Māori and Pasifika cultural norms through theatrical performance. Torotoro's martial dance theatre could be considered an elaboration of his cabaret performances. He eroticised and commodified his Māori and queer identity to entertain predominantly non-Māori audiences. At the same time,

however, these performances allowed Mika to explore and declare his queer and native identity. In a similar way, the creation and performance of *Mika HAKA* might be seen to have provided an opportunity for Torotoro to evolve and declare a contemporary expression of their urban youth culture through their martial dance theatre. Their performance particularly countered domestic stereotypes about their generation. Torotoro's bodies had a special denotative value in New Zealand: their athleticism and confidence refuted dominant media portrayals of Māori and Pasifika youth as ill in health and spirit. This local significance of Torotoro's performance was the company's principal point of reference during their participation in *Mika HAKA*. Their engagement with domestic socio-political concerns sustained their international presentation of their exotic-erotic performance.

It might be argued that Torotoro's martial dance theatre, as seen in *Mika HAKA*, presents a rekeying of wero and haka that revises the preceding theatrical interpretation of these martial rituals in kapa haka. Kapa haka expresses contemporary Māori concerns and has a commercial aspect. The genre's positioning in New Zealand, however, defines it as a preservation of tribal culture, and it might be seen to contribute to a neocolonial historicisation of Māori identity. In contrast, the overt syncretism, eroticism and commercial agenda of Torotoro's martial dance theatre may present new urbane and contemporary images of Māori identity. However, the way in which *Mika HAKA* meets the conventions of Western dance theatre does not suggest an escape from the persistent colonial gaze, but a different negotiation with it. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the possibility remains that Torotoro's martial dance theatre for some domestic and foreign audiences presented a superficial representation of Māori cultural identity perpetuating colonialist stereotypes, while for others it was perceived as an ironic and flirtatious subversion of these typifications.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined *Mika HAKA* to explore how martial dance theatre adapts ritualised martial arts practices to create international performance with an

exotic and erotic potential. By doing so, the genre necessarily engages with foreign cultural agendas and expectations in a way that might be seen to create commodified versions of the cultural identities ordinarily supported by these hereditary disciplines. In the case of *Mika HAKA*, the juxtaposition of the martial ritual challenges of wero and haka with breaking elides the specific significance they possess in their customary contexts (as differing expressions of ethnic or racial identities) and rekeys each as bodily spectacles. This rekeying is most pronounced when Torotoro perform outside New Zealand, where their martial dance theatre creates a spectacle of Other male bodies.

Contemporary martial dance theatre might be seen to objectify the figure of the non-Western martial artist as a primitive. This keying is also observable in more traditional stagings of the martial arts (kapa haka in the case of Torotoro). This emergent genre, however, markets the kind of performance that such earlier practices used for localised diplomatic and commercial ends as a form of international and exotic mimetic capital. In doing so, martial dance theatre reveals a process of theatricalisation that has reshaped the martial arts since practitioners began adapting their disciplines to create spectacles for compatriot and foreign audiences. Furthermore, the genre reveals the martial arts' ordinarily concealed contribution to the performative construction of identities, and in particular idealised, ethnically specific masculinities – Ancient Warriors. What is ambiguous is the degree to which contemporary martial dance theatre's reiteration of the martial arts – which might be considered crystallizations of corporeal styles – subverts or entrenches dominant norms of gender, ethnicity and race in the performers homelands and the Western nations to which they tour.

Chapter Two: Samudra

This chapter examines Samudra's production *The Sound of Silence*. Mika HAKA combined martial arts and dance to explicitly create an exotic-erotic performance for Western audiences. *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to present a comparable spectacle but one in which the erotic implications are implicit and somewhat disavowed. In her introduction to *Where the Rain is Born: Writings about Kerala* Anita Nair describes Samudra's home state as a place where "stifling conservative attitudes" reign (Nair 2002:xi). This chapter examines how the socio-political circumstances of Samudra's homeland contributed to the creation of a disavowed display of sexuality in their martial dance theatre. It also considers what *The Sound of Silence* may have communicated when performed in the different cultural setting of the UK. *The Sound of Silence* toured England in 2005, and Madhu and Sajeew performed a version of the production at Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006.¹

Samudra's choreography in *The Sound of Silence* combines the unarmed drills of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* called *meippayāṭṭu*, abstract dance movements from *bharatanāṭyam* called *nṛtta*, and geometric body postures from *haṭha-yoga* called *asana*. The production detaches them from their customary frames and rekeys them as the vocabulary of Samudra's innovative dance theatre. Each of these movement practices is distinctly and differently gendered. *Kaḷarippayaṭṭu* is Kerala's hereditary martial art. It is derived from the mediaeval training regime of Malayāḷi warriors, and today it remains almost entirely a male preserve. Contrastingly, women artists dominate *bharatanāṭyam*, and this classical dance form is widely understood to be a twentieth century reformation of an ancient and exclusively female temple performance tradition. The characterisation of martial *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as a male

¹ Samudra, *The Sound of Silence* (Leicester, Birmingham, London, Salford, Bristol, Much Wenlock & Pershore: 27 August to 11 September 2005). Samudra, *The Sound of Silence – extract* (Edinburgh: Dance Base, 10-20 August 2006).

practice and of aesthetic *bharatanāṭyam* as female pursuit, might be seen to encapsulate the heteronormative gender roles that Dyer notes, creating examples of ‘masculinity-as-activity’ and endorsing display as a feminine role (Dyer 1992:269). (The influence of Eurocentric values upon this division is part of this chapter’s discussion). Moreover, using Butler’s analysis, each practice suggests a connatural correspondence between the attributes of these corporeal styles and their male and female practitioners.

Samudra’s combination of *kālarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam* in their martial dance theatre might be seen to present Madhu and Sajeev as figures with masculine and feminine gender attributes. This situation is further complicated by their inclusion of *haṭha-yoga* postures in *The Sound of Silence*. Historically, these *asana* are used to pacify the body and prepare for deep spiritual meditation. Samudra’s use of them might suggest that their performance practice is about transcendence of the body, including gender and sexuality. The integration and rekeying of these distinct disciplines as Samudra’s martial dance theatre vocabulary disturbs their usual totemic values, as embodiments of idealised martial masculinity, aesthetic femininity and spiritual androgyny. *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to produce a subversive repetition of the gender norms and socio-spiritual values that *kālarippayaṭṭu*, *bharatanāṭyam* and *haṭha-yoga* are ordinarily seen to encapsulate. In addition, their integration in the production creates a performance that evokes for Western audiences what Torgovnick calls the “miscellaneous and contradictory” ideas of primitivist discourse, in particular the violent and spiritual “double valance” of the primitive man (Torgovnick 1997:14).

“Soul” is Madhu and Sajeev’s first duet in *The Sound of Silence*. It demonstrates how their martial dance theatre might be seen to offer a disavowed erotic display. At its commencement, Sajeev stands behind Madhu, who is laying spread-eagle facedown. Both men wear only *leṅgoṭṭi* (the loincloths worn in *kālarippayaṭṭu*). To the sound of rapid light

drumming Sajeer bends slowly forwards, and places his hands on the floor either side of Madhu's hips. Balancing on one leg, he smoothly lowers himself down and seems to nuzzle Madhu's back. Madhu lifts his chest and face to the sky, arching his spine, then pushes backwards and curls into a ball. Sajeer's chest and belly curve tight to Madhu's back. A tiny gap remains between the men. In unison, the men rise to their knees and undulate in parallel. They thrust their hips forward sending an impulse up their spines, which makes their arms rise and fall like wings beating. The men shift to double time, and their pelvic thrusts get incrementally stronger. At the end of "Soul," Madhu straddles Sajeer like a horse, who crouches between his legs. Both men gaze at the audience. Madhu bends to Sajeer, who rises to meet him. Madhu wraps his arms about Sajeer, who reaches back to hold him too. Skin-to-skin, entangled in a complex embrace, they gently rock from side to side.

"Soul" closely intermeshes aspects of Samudra's principal movement disciplines. The dancers' slow progression through extended postures is derived from *hatha-yoga* practices. Their pelvic impulses are like the core body movements that motivate all actions in *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, and their skin-to-skin contact also echoes grappling practice. But Madhu and Sajeer's rippling and flaring arms are gestural, and comparable to the movements of *bharatanāṭyam* dancers. Moreover, the men are able to synchronise their movements precisely with the accompanying drum because of their training in the rigorous timing of this classical dance form.

In "Soul," Madhu and Sajeer's faces are impassive and their gazes are distant. Their duet appears to be a piece of abstract dance. What is more, their containment could be seen to affirm the reticence that Burt identifies as central to Western heteronormative masculinity (Burt 2006:18). At the same time, however, the men (little dressed) present a display of their bodies. What is more, they make dynamic pelvic movements in close proximity to one another. Madhu and Sajeer have been made aware of the (homo)erotic potential of their

dance through interactions with audience members of their own productions, and those of the works they performed with Daksha Sheth.

No recordings of Sheth's productions in which Madhu and Sajeer danced are publicly available. I have viewed footage, however, of *BhuKham: A Circus of Earth and Sky*. The production is part of Sheth's current repertoire and is indicative of her work. One section features a young man – wearing *lengotti* – performing fast acrobatics on a tall wooden pole.² His body shines with sweat as he whizzes about. The audience sitting close at his feet are predominantly middle aged, middle class New Delhi women dressed in fine silk saris. In this footage I see erotic tensions, and conversations with Madhu and Sajeer indicate that a sexual audience-performer frisson was often present in the works they performed with Sheth (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006). In her essay, "Search for My Tongue," Sheth explains that her "bold treatment of sensuality" shocks Indian audiences (Sheth 2003:105). In theatres where dancers ordinarily wear heavy costuming and barely touch, Sheth presents mixed and same-sex duets, with full body contact, in which the male dancers wear only *lengotti*. In an interview in 2000 Sheth also acknowledged that her work has been condemned in India as pornographic (Sheth 2000).

When dancing with Sheth, Madhu and Sajeer were aware of such public opinion. On leaving her company to found Samudra, Madhu and Sajeer danced for a number of corporate events in New Delhi in 1998. After these performances the men had to field explicit sexual propositions from Indian men and women prompted by their performances of the intimate duets that seeded *Sound of Silence* (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006). Moreover, Anton Giulio Onofri, who created a short documentary film about their performance of *The Sound of Silence* in Italy in 2000, spoke and wrote to them at length about the ways in which their

² This is a demonstration *mallakhamb*, a Maharashtrian gymnastic discipline.

performance awakened in him sexual feelings – though he identifies as heterosexual (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006).

Madhu and Sajeev's cross training (a regime they commenced when working for Sheth) integrates *meippayāṭṭu*, *nṛtta*, and *asana*. This enables them to articulate their limbs with explosive pelvic impulses and driving rhythms in one moment, and to move with slow motion and consummate control into long and expansive postures in the next. Their diverse assertive and yielding movements and minimal dress might be seen in combination to create an ambisexual bodily display. Katherine Liepe-Levinson's book *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* examines striptease in the USA. Male strippers, she says, perform movements (like those seen in "Soul") with "staccato accents and accelerating rhythms that suggest the intensity and power associated with 'male aggressiveness'" (Liepe-Levinson 2002:109). In contrast, female strippers favour undulating gestures (such as also seen in "Soul"), which focus the audience's attention on the "display of flesh and particular body parts" (Liepe-Levinson 2002:109).

The comparison of Samudra's martial dance theatre to striptease might seem to promote an ahistorical and acultural analysis of *The Sound of Silence*. However, the corporeal styles Leipe-Levinson details are found in Bollywood films, whose gradual sexualisation (whether extolled or deplored) has a pervading influence in India, including conservative Kerala. Indeed, "Rhythm" (which this chapter examines from a number of perspectives) might be seen to resemble Ranbir Kapoor's performance in the movie *Saawariya*, which is one of the most erotic male dances in Bollywood's history (Bhansali 2007). Wearing only a sheer white cotton sarong, Kapoor dances motifs from men's folk dances – pelvic flicks, shoulder shrugs and vigorous hops. But he also strikes prone poses: he reclines slowly onto his back on top of a grand piano, caressing his chest and being caressed by diaphanous fabric curtains that billow over him. The provocative comparison of *The Sound of Silence* to

striptease and Bollywood prepares the ground for my consideration of two topics: how the company's chorographic innovation might be seen to expand Chandralekha and Sheth's sexualisation of Indian dance theatre; and how Samudra's martial dance theatre engaged its British audiences.

Samudra say that "Soul" depicts the descent of the human soul (Sajeev) into the physical body (Madhu). They express this narrative without recourse to the codified facial expressions of classic Indian dance, relying instead on bodily movement to communicate the theme. Their impassive faces and distant gazes, however, might also be seen to facilitate a disavowal of the sexuality present in their performance. In *Strip Show* Liepe-Levinson says:

in order for erotic sparks to fly between pairs of 'hungry I's', the gaze of the looker must be returned – not by passive 'sex objects' with vacant, empty stares – but again, at the very least, by the fiction of a like-seeing sexual subject who offers the pretense of a desiring looker in return (Liepe-Levinson 2002:120).

By maintaining neutral expressions Samudra seem not to encourage the desirous looking that their body movements' erotic potential may invite. Their martial dance theatre offers the audience a spectacular display of male bodies, while their distant gaze means that neither they nor their audience need acknowledge an erotic exchange is afoot.

Samudra's gaze is often distant, like that of a yoga practitioner. Their attention seems directed inward, suggesting their spiritual detachment from the physicality – and sexuality – of their movements. But their gaze is not empty. It is nuanced by their cross training in martial and aesthetic disciplines. This nuanced gaze intermittently ruptures the contract of distance and disavowal that predominates in their martial dance theatre. Instances arise in which they address their audience with messages of seduction and hostility, and an ambiguous intermingling of the two. At the end of "Rhythm," Madhu looks at the audience from under his brow and smiles gently. His arms are stretched up above his head, and the musculature of his torso is flexed. He presents himself in such a way as to suggest a moment of flirtation with the audience. How might *The Sound of Silence* be viewed in such a way?

The violent threat of their martial actions, their performance of a women's classical dance and their yogic introspection may each help facilitate an uncommitted bodily display.

Madhu and Sajeev's stage personae in *The Sound of Silence* seem closely comparable to their daily identities. Like Sheth's productions, their performance makes little recourse to the complex costume and make-up prevalent in Kerala's performance traditions. Neither do they dance to lyrics or narration that assigns them explicit characters. The men dance, so to speak, as themselves. Moreover, Madhu and Sajeev are choreographers of their own image. When performing for Sheth the men were executors of her choreographic vision. They were implicated in creating the sexualised displays in this work, but authorial responsibility for the productions, and the response they provoked, remained with Sheth. However, no such distance can be observed in Samudra's martial dance theatre. The men are both the choreographers and principal dancers of *The Sound of Silence*. Their martial dance theatre is therefore necessarily created and performed with consideration of its potential to improve or damage their social standing in their native, conservative state. This situation might be seen to have led to the development in Samudra's performances of what Susan Leigh Foster calls 'closeting' devices.

In her 2001 essay "Closets Full of Dances" Foster notes Mathew Bourne's downplaying of the homosexual themes of his production *Swan Lake*, in which the swans are male. Foster quotes an interview in which Bourne emphasises instead the "universal" content of his production (Foster 2001:149). Foster's essay unfolds from here. She says:

Critical reviews sustain Bourne's intent by consistently failing to mention any homosexual references. Both the dance, in its sensuous representation of same-sex desire, and the criticism, in its uncanny neglect of obvious homosexual content, bring into sharp relief modern dance's closeting of homosexuality throughout this century. The production's scale and enormous popularity illuminate with astonishing clarity just how little sexual desire, much less homosexual desire, the modern dance tradition has ever staged. For one hundred years, modern dancers and choreographers have resisted all allegations that their art alluded, however discretely or remotely, to sex (Foster 2001:149).

Foster's essay focuses on the work of American modern and contemporary dancers, and identifies five means by which they might be seen to have contained or secreted the eroticism of the bodily displays they staged. Comparisons might be made between the social restraints on sexual expression that Foster's twentieth century subjects navigated and those that constrain Samudra's creative processes in Kerala. Moreover, examining *The Sound of Silence* in relation to these closeting devices helps detail the overall structure of the company's martial dance theatre, and the ways in which it may differently address audiences in Kerala (and other Indian states) and the Western nations to which Samudra tour. The closeting devices Foster identifies might be named as: a 'workerlike ambiance', classicism, abstraction, religiosity, and exoticism. My analysis of *The Sound of Silence* examines each device in order.

Foster explores the closeting potential of a workerlike ambiance through her examination of 'contact improvisation,' as danced by an all-male group called Mangrove, who performed in San Francisco from 1975 to 1980 (Foster 2001:183). She says, contact improvisation "asks dancers to create and focus on a moving point of physical contact between two or more bodies" (Foster 2001:178). When contact improvisation began, the sexual connotations of this body contact, says Foster, "were either denied or treated as an irrelevant detail" (Foster 2001:182). She states: "The body adventurously mingled with any other and all bodies but the logics of sexual desire were never engaged" (Foster 2001:182). She adds, "contact improvisation shared with sports a workerlike ambiance, devoid of drama or pretense, in which dancers simply focussed on the task at hand" (Foster 2001:180).

Madhu and Sajeev might be seen to perform with a workerlike ambiance in *The Sound of Silence*. The production presents them as 'martial artists doing dance'. In India, their *leṅgoṭṭi* identify them as *kālarippayattu* practitioners: their dress keys them as men trained in the utilitarian task of combat. Moreover, wherever the men perform, Madhu and Sajeev's

movements demonstrate a combative potential. They perform *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* kicks: *catipurumkal*, jumping into the air as if to kick an opponent's jaw; and *vitukal*, in which their kicking legs circle like propellers. In each case, the men's kicks have momentum and force. A loud slap is heard, as their feet hit their own outstretched hands. In addition, Madhu and Sajeev's demeanour seems to indicate that their martial training has made them practitioners focussed on the utilitarian consequence of their actions, rather than the pictographic value of their bodily image. *Kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioners must look at prescribed points during every instant of the *meppayaṭṭu*, as they execute offensive kicks, evasive jumps and turns, and defensive lunges and low squats. Over time this training creates a steady gaze. Samudra display this way of looking when they perform the elements of *meppayaṭṭu* in *The Sound of Silence*. As in the *kaḷari*, their gaze is an extension of their actions, penetrating the space in a manner similar to their kicks and blows.

Samudra also use this intense gaze, however, when performing movement vocabulary not derived from *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. For example, in the middle of "Rhythm," they look directly at the audience as they travel forward with short stabbing steps. The men's intense glower is interrogative. This quality is made prominent because every four strides they pause. Standing stock still, their arms hanging by their sides, they turn their heads sharp right, then back to the front. They look left, and to the front once more. They repeatedly break and then re-establish their visual lock on the audience.

Samudra's tightly focussed gaze, and their strong and direct movements, might imply that their chief concern when moving on stage, as in the *kaḷari*, is the utilitarian combative potential value of their actions. But in *The Sound of Silence* Samudra's martial gaze is part of their theatrical performance. As such, the intention of their piercing regard is rekeyed. On the one hand, when focussed in the distance, it is a device that makes Samudra appear to disregard their audience. But when turned on their audience it issues an invitation or

challenge, daring them, perhaps, to look back with equal intensity. The hostile edge of Madhu and Sajeev's gaze may be even suggest that they are spurning their audience.

On the one hand, Madhu and Sajeev's martial gaze in *The Sound of Silence* implies that all their movements on stage are utilitarian, rather than part of a bodily exhibition with a sensual dimension, and an erotic potential. Yet the confines and conventions of the stage frame – as discussed in Chapter One – ever contradict the combative intent of a martial dance theatre performer. The tension between Madhu and Sajeev's commitment to a workerlike ambiance and the aesthetic frame in which they perform might be seen to create an example (like Mokoera's wero actions in *Mika HAKA*) of what Sontag calls naïve camp: "seriousness that fails" (Sontag 1966:283).

A similar failure may befall their potential presentation as 'workmates', rather than dance partners. In "Rhythm," Madhu and Sajeev perform in perfect unison, like movement clones. Side by side with a small gap between them they travel the stage. This parallel relationship might be seen to diffuse the homoerotic potential of their dancing together. In this formation – and also the majority of their duets – they do not look at one another. They appear focussed on the movement task in hand, not each other. Madhu and Sajeev's parallel relationship on stage replicates that which they sustain when drilling *meppayaṭṭu* in the *kaḷari*. There, however, Madhu and Sajeev's movement in close proximity is keyed as a necessity. It helps them navigate past other practitioners in the crowded training space, and it tests their control and precision. On stage, such proximity is rekeyed. The utilitarian rationale that explains the complicity and synchronisation of their *kaḷari* relationship is absent. Their martial movements are rekeyed (or perhaps exposed) as a form of play, with sensual dimensions. In the aesthetic frame of the stage, such movement suggests Madhu and Sajeev's desire to move together. The men are workerlike: they are active and reticent in ways that Burt and Dyer consider vital to a presentation of Western heteronormativity – and which also

pertain to contemporary Malayāli ideas of masculinity (as will be discussed below). Yet Samudra stage *meippayāṭṭu* in arenas where Eurocentric anxieties question male dancers masculinity and sexuality. This conjunction brings attention to the desire of men to move together that may be seen to motivate both their performance and the training practices of *kaḷarippayāṭṭu*. A potential slippage in the martial arts is suggested, connecting what Sedgwick's calls sanctioned homosociality and reprobate homosexuality (Sedgwick 1985:89).

Samudra's martial gaze – part of their workerlike ambiance – cannot hide the erotic potential of their bodily display, but it does 'closet' it. Madhu and Sajeev's *nerkal* kicks – executed in *leṅgoṭṭi* and 'on the beat' – might be compared to the high-kicks that Lieppe-Levinson ascribes to male strippers. She notes that such strippers use their eyes and facial expressions to signal to the audience their awareness of the sexual spectacle they are creating. But when Samudra execute *nerkal* their gaze is fixed on their toes, high above their heads. They seem oblivious to the audience. Lieppe-Levinson notes that in daily life "eye-contact avoidance can be a marker of defiance, a refusal to recognize the presence of existence or another" (Lieppe-Levinson 2002:119). In the context of Samudra's performance, however, such omission enables Madhu and Sajeev to entertain their audience with the spectacle of high kicks, while seemingly being intent on such movements' utilitarian potential, as combative actions not an erotic pictographic display.

Samudra's workerlike ambiance obscures the fact that they exhibit their bodies for their audiences' delight. In other words, because Madhu and Sajeev kick 'as if' intending to hurt, then their audience may engage in erotic gazing at them, without being seen to do so. The audience may look at the men as they please. The men do not look back, however, with the pretended desirous gaze, which says Lieppe-Levinson, is crucial to the sexual charge of striptease. Their contained martial gaze does not proclaim an erotic value in their movements.

This means, perhaps, that an audience member who sees such potential in Samudra's martial dance theatre is obliged to own this perspective, as his or her own creation.

From a differing perspective, it might be argued that Samudra's stage presentation of *meippayāṭṭu* fundamentally destabilises the utilitarian aspect of these martial actions. Their martial dance theatre shifts focus from the vestigial martial potential of these codified combat sequences to their aesthetic value as rhythmic and spatial movement patterns. For example, in "Rhythm," as the section's name indicates, the martial intent embedded in Samudra's movement vocabulary is made subservient to the dancers' interest in musicality. They execute *meippayāṭṭu* actions in time to the accompanying drumming. The men kick on beat. Because Samudra's marital movements are performed to a regular metre, they are predictable and as such do not appear very dangerous. Moreover, this 'taming' effect is amplified by Madhu and Sajeev's repetition of potentially combative actions. At the opening of "Rhythm," they cross the stage on a grand diagonal, kicking suddenly as if to attack an opponent. Following a scuttling retreat, they repeat the approach exactly. Because the audience now know what to expect they can sit back and enjoy the spectacle of the second kick. *The Sound of Silence* uses the workerlike *nerkal* as a thrilling high kick.

Moreover, Samudra's choreography adds to the structures of *meippayāṭṭu* to make these drills more spectacular. For example, in "Rhythm," the men perform *irrutikal*, a key evasive movement from *kalariṭṭayāṭṭu*. Mid-stride, they shift their weight to their rear legs and folding this support at the knee they drop to sitting on the floor. At this point, Samudra insert an additional movement into *irrutikal*. They roll sideways and use the momentum gained to leap back to standing. This roll is not seen in the *kalari*. It has no martial purpose. Its addition to *irrutikal* is aesthetic and expressive. It enables Madhu and Sajeev to 'appear' a certain way, rather than to 'do' a certain thing.

Samudra's rearrangement and adaptation of *meppayattu*, and presentation of these martial art pattern practices in the stage frame, inflates what Goffman might call their pictographic value. Rather than investing Samudra's performance with closeting workerlike ambiance, in *The Sound of Silence* these martial arts actions are rekeyed as aesthetic movements. A similar rekeying occurs to the attributes of Samudra's physiques, acquired through their *kalarippayattu* training. Their muscularity, stability, flexibility, and explosive strength are detached from the imperatives of combat that governed their formation. In *The Sound of Silence* the men move their bodies in rhythm to music, and position themselves for the viewers gaze. Samudra's martial bodies and corporeal styles become rekeyed as spectacular bodies and male dance. According to the norms that Dyer analyses, male bodies on display must be active to best retain their masculinity. When presented on the stage, however, Samudra's *meppayattu* fails to remain a utilitarian demonstration. It becomes, instead, an expressive display. If, despite Dyer and other commentators doubts, Berger's maxim holds – “*men act and women appear*” – then through this rekeying Samudra's *meppayattu* and Madhu and Sajeev are potentially femininised (Berger 1972:47 [italics in original]).

In “Closets Full of Dances” Foster suggests that allusions to antique, classical cultural values have also been used to closet eroticism in new forms of Western dance theatre. Foster considers how aligning their dance with Greek classical sculpture helped Isadora Duncan to excuse her otherwise taboo exposure of her body, and enabled Ted Shawn to camouflage the homoeroticism of his all male dance works. Foster says of Duncan's dance:

Through her shaping of and in space, she trained viewers to attend to the sculptural potential of movement. Not only did she resemble a work of classical art but she articulated a new yet classical movement aesthetic. [...] She drew upon the dignity of the body summoned up in Hellenistic humanism (Foster 2001:152).

She describes Shawn's company similarly:

Never undulating or contracting but sometimes twisting in the manner of classical Greek sculpture, dancers locomoted and then posed, turned and then jumped, ran to a new place and

posed again. [...] The dancers' shaved armpits and chests further enhanced their resemblance to classical Greek beings in repose and in motion (Foster 2001:164).

Foster considers how the classicalism in Duncan and Shawn's performance helped to make their departures from ballet – perhaps 'the' classical Western dance form – more socially acceptable. In the case of *The Sound of Silence* it is the company's integration of *bharatanāṭyam* – 'the' classical Indian dance form – that imbues Samudra's martial dance theatre with a classicalism. Moreover, through this integration their dance is connected to both the aesthetics of the South Indian temple sculpture, and the Hindu religion – both of which are entwined with *bharatanāṭyam*.

The Sound of Silence is often performed in a frame that particularly invites comparison between Samudra's martial dance theatre and *bharatanāṭyam*. At home and abroad, the company dance in theatres and festivals where performances by female *bharatanāṭyam* dancers have become positioned as the quintessence of Indian dance. *The Sound of Silence* thus encounters audiences' expectations shaped largely by viewing such presentations. Moreover, the production uses choreographic structures from *bharatanāṭyam*. Madhu's solo at the close of "Duet," for example, features the very combination of florid footwork and flamboyant hand gestures that is central to a *thillana* – the finale item in a *bharatanāṭyam* performance. Indeed, the *nṛtta* of *bharatanāṭyam* might be identified as the principal inspiration for the abstraction that predominates in *The Sound of Silence*.

The narratives expressed in *bharatanāṭyam* and those in circulation about *bharatanāṭyam*, in India and beyond, make the form synonymous with chaste spirituality. O'Shea's says, in *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*, that its performers are girlish and coquettish but innocent and contained, and that their dance has "an enduring sense of propriety" (O'Shea 2007:104). The formal connections between Samudra's martial dance theatre and *bharatanāṭyam* might be seen to key *The Sound of Silence* as a work similarly classical, chaste and spiritual, thus closeting its erotic potential. However, though

Madhu and Sajeev's duets, such as "Soul," may express devotional narratives like those seen in a *bharatanāṭyam* this referencing of this classical dance might be seen to expose rather than closet sexual dimensions in their martial dance theatre. This is because "Soul" shows two men playing roles ordinarily gendered as male and female.

Many *bharatanāṭyam* narratives depict the quest of the individual soul, characterised as female, for mergence with the universal superconscious, characterised as male. O'Shea discusses how this interweaving of gender roles and theology is embedded in the devotional poetry which is used as lyrics for *bharatanāṭyam*. She says: "The narrator who is also usually the main female character, longs for return of the god-lover and remembers their moments of erotic contact" (O'Shea 2007:113). In this way, says O'Shea, *bharatanāṭyam* keys "heterosexual intimacy as a metaphor for the innately unequal relationship of a devotee to god" (O'Shea 2007:113).

In "Soul" this convention is skewed. The relationship between the individual and cosmic soul is presented not as the coy, innocent heterosexual 'romance' that it might be rendered in classical dance, but as the intimate undulating dance of two men. On the one hand, this substitution might be seen to suggest a portrayal of homosexual desire, perhaps affirming the prejudices about male dancers that Burt considers, and which (in my experience) can also operate in India (Burt 2006:24). On the other hand, the homosociality of "Soul" might suggest a masculinist cosmology from which women are expelled. Madhu and Sajeev, however, dance "Soul" in *leṅgoṭṭi*. This adds to the erotic potential of their duet. Similarly, they dance *nṛtta* in little more, emphasising its potential to facilitate a sexualised bodily display. Samudra's performance of *bharatanāṭyam* movements and narratives might be seen as a subversive and erotic reiteration of the form. This implicates the company in the discourse that questions the cultural origin of the imperatives that key *bharatanāṭyam* as a chaste idiom, and the dance practice that contests this ideal.

Before considering this topic further it is necessary to consider Madhu and Sajeev's intimacy in "Soul" in relationship to the customs and mores of their homeland society where they create such dance. On the one hand, Kerala culture does not position men as erotic figures. Movies in Malayālam, Kerala's native language, dominate the state's popular culture. Female stars of these films are ingénues and gifted dancers, but their male counterparts are ordinarily older and less graceful. This distinction might be seen to affirm the dominant South Indian gender norms of chaste femininity and stolid masculinity. The quintessential Malayāli male lead is Mohanlal Vishwanathan Nair, who has dominated Kerala's films since the 1980s. In his essay "Queer Bonds: Male Friendships in Contemporary Malayālam Cinema" T. Muraleedharan says Mohanlal's "man's man" persona has secured his popular appeal, but he also notes the actor's "big child" on-screen behaviour (Muraleedharan 2002: 183). This infantile quality may allow Mohanlal – and actors in his mould – to be attractive and appealing without seeming erotic and dangerous. In a magazine article Sadanand Menon suggests: "The Southern [film] hero, for long, carried himself within the armature of androgyny. His erotic appeal worked equally for male and female" (Menon 2008:78). Menon implies that an ambisexual appeal makes for an attractive male figure that does not challenge South Indian audience members' own identification with stolid masculinity and chaste femininity.

Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to accommodate Kerala's conservatism by presenting a similarly ambiguous display of sexuality. On the one hand, the men present an idealised Malayāli masculinity – the active and reticent *kaḷarippayattu* practitioner. Their male performance of *bharatanāṭyam*, however, suggests what Hari Krishan calls, in his essay in *When Men Dance*, 'gynemimesis' – the imitation of women (Krishnan 2009:386). Samudra's juxtaposition of masculine and feminine gendered corporeal styles, though unconventional for Malayāli audiences, invests Madhu and Sajeev with an ambisexuality that

softens the challenge that their (potentially erotic) bodily display creates for Malayāḷi men and Malayāḷi women.

While negotiating reservations about overt displays of male sexuality, Samudra's martial dance theatre might also be seen to exploit the licence for male homosocial physical intimacy found in Kerala. In her book, *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East*, Gita Mehta observes that urbanised Indian society confines all expressions of heterosexuality to married couples' bedrooms (Mehta 1979:269). Public displays of affection in Thiruvananthapuram (Samudra's home and Kerala's capital) are mainly homosocial and are regarded as platonic. Male homosexuality is illegal in India, and expressions of gay or queer identity are closeted in Kerala society. In combination, this creates a context that complicates the distinction between sanctioned homosociality and reprobate homosexuality that Sedgwick finds "radically disrupted" in Western culture (Sedgwick 1985:2).

It might be suggested that the ease of male homosocial physical intimacy and the silence about queer sexuality in Kerala have permitted Madhu and Sajeev to dance together in intimate ways that would be prohibited if they were a Malayāḷi man and woman. Their skin-to-skin dancing may be unusual in Kerala, but their male intimacy is not. Moreover, Kerala audiences may be inhibited from publicly voicing erotic connotations that they may observe in Madhu and Sajeev's duets. To do so would have serious implications for both the commentator and the dancers. The erotic potential of their martial dance theatre, when performed in Kerala, is thus somewhat closeted by the state's homosocial-homophobic culture.

To look more closely at how Samudra's inclusion of *bharatanāṭyam* in their martial dance theatre may closet or expose the erotic potential of their dance requires consideration of this dance form's history. *Bharatanāṭyam* coalesced in the 1930s as a result of the celebrated performances of *dāsīattam* items on concert hall stages by Rukmini Devi Arundale, a

Brahmin Tamil woman.³ *Dāsīattam* is a temple practice that flowered in the tenth-century Chola dynasty, in which lower caste Tamil women called *devadāsī* danced before the idols of male deities to which they were legally married. In his essay, “Kutiyattam,” Farley P. Richmond describes such temple dance as “a visual sacrifice,” comparable to the floral and fragrant oblations of Hindu worship, and Mandakrant Bose, in her book *Speaking of Dance: The Indian Critique*, observes that the *bharatanāṭyam* dancer’s movements are similarly “regarded as offerings of devotion” (Richmond 1990:88; Bose 2001:74). However, Devi intended the *bharatanāṭyam* dancer’s ‘offering’, in contrast to that of the *devadāsī*, to be one in which the sexual aspects of *sringara* (erotic love) were distinguished from a personal and impassioned expression of *bhakti* (religious devotion). In his journal article “Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance” Matthew Harp Allen summarises how Devi’s dance rekeyed *dāsīattam* by transplanting it from the temple sanctuary to the proscenium stage, excluding overt eroticism (in movement, costume and narrative), and renaming it *bharatanāṭyam* – meaning ‘Indian dance drama’ – to suggest its connection to a Hindu golden age (Allen 1997:79).

Samudra’s inclusion of *bharatanāṭyam* in *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to affect the position of their martial dance theatre within the hierarchy of Indian performing arts. According to Indian aesthetic values dance may be positioned on a continuum between *deśī* (folk culture) and *mārgā* (classical culture). In his book *The Advaita of Art* Harsha V. Dehejia determines that *deśī* is plebeian *lokānurañjana* (worldly entertainment) while *mārgā* is higher and *svargya* (heavenward leading) (Dehejia 1996:8). This distinction is interconnected with ancient Hindu teachings concerning spiritual ‘purity,’ which also underpin the complex traditional social hierarchies particular to each region of India. Hindu cosmology observes the interplay of three universal *guṇa* (aspects or qualities): *sattva* (purity) inviting spiritual

³ Rukmini Devi Arundale (b.1904 - d.1986).

ascendancy; *rajas* (activity and passion) facilitating horizontal expansion; and *tamas* (inertia and darkness) leading to confused embroilment in material existence.

Bharatanāṭyam is definitively categorised as *mārgā*. It is *svargya* and *sattva* – heavenward leading and pure. Samudra’s inclusion of the form in *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to position their martial dance theatre similarly. On the other hand, however, this integration may draw attention to the erotic potential of their performance rather than closet it. Samudra present a ‘wrong’ repetition of this corporeal style: they are men and they dance in minimal dress. Their *bharatanāṭyam* is contrary to the ideal image of the chaste woman that Devi enshrined as the acme of the form. Indeed, the erotic potential of Samudra’s dancing might be seen as reverting to the worldliness of *dāsīattam* that she rejected, and position *The Sound of Silence* as not *svargya* and *sattva*, but *lokānurañjana* and *tamas* – worldly and material.

Rayon Mitra, in her essay “Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer,” recounts the castigation and censorship that her contemporary choreography has encountered in India. She explains, “we had depicted Indian bodies and identities as sexual and thus aligned them with western values” (Mitra 1984:77). Her comment invites close consideration of how the erotic potential of *The Sound of Silence* might imply to Indian audiences, in Kerala especially, the foreignness of Samudra’s martial dance theatre – as well as, or instead of, their reversion to dance akin to *dāsīattam*. Analysis of this matter is complicated by scholarly discourse suggesting that the chaste values enshrined in *bharatanāṭyam* are themselves a construct made under Western influence.

Mitra, in “Living a Body Myth,” examines *bharatanāṭyam* as “a nationalist art created to cleanse, purify and regulate ‘the erotic and base’ practice of Sadir [*dāsīattam*]” (Mitra 1984:68). Her analysis arises from the fact, noted by Allen in “Rewriting the Script,” that a

Eurocentric ‘New Age’ body called the Theosophists helped develop *bharatanāṭyam* in order to uplift “the welfare of India” and to promote Theosophical values (Allen 1997:74).⁴ One of the key Theosophical tenets says V.P. Dhananjayan, in his book *Beyond Performing Art and Culture: Politico-social Aspects*, is “art without vulgarity” (Dhananjayan 2007:90). In his book *Chandralekha: Woman, Dance, Resistance* Rustom Bharucha notes that the Theosophists also supported the high caste North Indian men who led the Congress Party (India’s chief independence movement), and that their promotion of *bharatanāṭyam* helped propagate the values of this political elite (Bharucha 1995:42). In 1994 Chandralekha suggested that India’s ruling classes continue to support *bharatanāṭyam* because of its international market appeal, not its domestic significance (Kolmes 1994:35). In a 2005 interview contemporary Indian dancer Anita Ratnam stated that female *bharatanāṭyam* dancers are now moulded to a Western ideal, being petite, exotic and doll-like (Venkat 2005). Such comments, by native and foreign scholars and practitioners of Indian dance, suggest that *bharatanāṭyam* is an iconic representation of a perfect Indian woman constructed to meet Indian patriarchal values and Eurocentric exoticism. In this analysis *bharatanāṭyam* might be seen to create a fantasy body with an exotic-erotic value created and marketed in the service of what Lee call’s “oppressive and exploitative systems” (Lee 2001:78).

The inclusion of *bharatanāṭyam* in *The Sound of Silence* implies the substitution of Madhu and Sajeev for female dancers of this form, and suggests a relationship between their martial dance theatre and these women’s performances of an exotic-erotic ‘Eastern’ femininity. In this light, the classicalism that *bharatanāṭyam* brings to Samdura’s performance, particularly in a Western nation like the UK, might be seen to not ‘closet’ but ‘excuse’ the sexual dimensions of their dance. Moreover, Madhu and Sajeev’s performance of *bharatanāṭyam* in the UK invited audiences to see the men’s dance as comparable to that of

⁴ Devi was married to British man Dr. George Sidney Arundale (b. 1878 – d. 1945) who was president of the Theosophical Society in Chennai.

the female *bharatanāṭyam* dancers. In this way, the production evoked the primitivist tropes Torgovnick examines, which can position non-Western men as the primitivist feminine counterpart of the civilised masculine West (Torgovnick 1997:14). Such a primitivist keying further contributes to the confusion of Madhu and Sajeer's on-stage gender, and 'queers' the potential eroticism of their bodily display. Perhaps, as surrogate women or feminine primitives, they become suitable objects for the male heterosexual gaze. They may also be keyed as homoerotic figures that welcome a homosexual male gaze. But, as Moore suggests, figures so keyed may equally welcome a heterosexual female erotic gaze also (Moore 1988:53).

In addition to including the classical dance form of *bharatanāṭyam* in their choreography Samudra's martial dance theatre also replicates body postures found in classical Indian sculpture. For example, in "Duet" Madhu and Sajeer frequently enter a deep square squat. Their hips rotate out to almost 180°. Their knees are wide apart, and their arms lifted high in a V-shape. Their bodies are splayed open. This stance resembles postures seen in Indian temple sculpture, whose iconography is closely related to that of *dāsīattam* and, consequently, its modern derivation *bharatanāṭyam*. Kapila Vatsyayan explores these interconnections in her book *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts* (Vatsyayan 1983), and Padma Subrahmanyam's three-volume study *Karanas: Common Dance Codes of India and Indonesia* further demonstrates these correspondences (Subrahmanyam 2003).

Chandrasekha used the postures found in classical temple sculpture to aid her choreographic departure from *bharatanāṭyam*. The new aesthetic that she created, says Chatterjea in her book *Butting Out*, explored "sexuality, and particularly female sexuality, as a vital aspect of self-realization and spiritual awakening" (Chatterjea 2004:148). Bharucha, in his book about Chandrasekha, says she sought neither *sringara* nor *bhakti*, but what art historian Priya Devi has called "the older, more powerful ambivalence of the Tantras"

(Bharucha 1995:135). Tantra advocates the pursuit of divine knowledge through sensual ritual activities, including sexual congress. Though Chandralekha's use of postures found in classical temple sculpture aligned her dance with an ancient India, it also advanced a sexualisation of her new dance. This duality might also be observed in *The Sound of Silence*.

Samudra's splayed posture may replicate temple sculpture, but it also opens out Madhu and Sajeev's bodies – dressed only in *lengotti* – to the audience's gaze, displaying their inner thighs, groin and belly. Connections that link postures such as this to Tantra counter the capacity of their classicism to closet the erotic potential of Samudra's martial dance theatre. But these connections may enable this erotic potential to 'pass' as tantric – perhaps rekeying the sexuality of their performance as 'spiritualised sensuality'. Such a proposition might be substantiated with reference to a continuing strain of apologist commentary about erotic Indian temple sculpture. For example, in a 2008 magazine article Benoy K. Behl quotes American Indologist Mary Ann Milford speaking about such sculpture.

When one sees the male and the female coming together, there is often a sense of eroticism. Here I would say it is sensual, and sensual in a devotional way, which is very different from sexual. I think I would associate eroticism with sexuality, and I do not see that in this. They are coming together as one, as more in a sense of community, in a sense of grace (Behl 2008:72).

In *Karma Cola*, however, Mehta states that because Tantra is "intimately concerned with sex" it has teetered "on the edge of social acceptance in India for several hundred years" (Mehta 1979:157). Commentary like that which Milford offers on Tantric art cannot shift this strand of Hindu culture from its marginal position. In India, comparison between postures in *The Sound of Silence* and tantric classical sculpture may suggest that Samudra's martial dance theatre has similarly dubious social status. In the UK, though Tantra is understood as Indian and ancient, it is principally regarded as a source of exciting and exotic sexual experience. For British audiences, where Samudra's dance is seen to replicate tantric sculpture their martial dance theatre becomes aligned with ideas of a sensational India – a 'Land of the *Kama Sutra*.' Rather than keying their martial dance theatre as classical and closeting its erotic potential,

these postures enhance this potential. They evoke those primitivist tropes that, says Torgovnick, describe the uncivilised non-Westerner as inherently libidinous and sexually irrepressible (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Samudra's splayed stance could be viewed as a simple body shape, and not a sexualised Tantric posture. Similarly, the high kicks of their *nerkal* might be seen not as pseudo-striptease, but as geometric forms devoid of erotic value. In "Closets Full of Dances" Foster examines how the keying of choreography as 'abstract' may closet its erotic potential. She explores this phenomenon with reference to Merce Cunningham's works in the late 50s and early 60s. She says: "Cunningham neutralized all masculine, feminine, and sexual connotations by focussing on space, time, and motion" (Foster 2001:172-4).

The Sound of Silence might be considered an abstract work. The majority of Samudra's movements do not illustrate an explicit narrative or thematic content. In "Duet," for example, Madhu and Sajeev progress through a series of formal geometric shapes. The men lay prone on their bellies in profile to the audience, feet to feet and looking off stage. They move in unison, creating a symmetrical stage picture: in slow motion each man lifts and lowers one leg; they then lift and lower their torsos; finally, they do both at once, curling the soles of their feet towards the back of their heads. While performing these geometric movements, Madhu and Sajeev's faces are impassive, and they gaze into the far distance, making no direct eye contact with one another or the audience. The abstract quality of Samudra's martial dance theatre is emphasised by their apparent emotional disengagement.

The contradiction between Madhu and Sajeev's fixed impassive expressions and their dynamic animated bodies recurs throughout *The Sound of Silence*. It is pronounced at the close of "Duet." The accompanying violin music rises in pitch, tempo and volume, and Madhu and Sajeev writhe on the floor in a cyclical movement motif that suggests a mounting frenzy. Yet their faces remain blank. Similarly, in "Rhythm," Madhu and Sajeev pause in the

midst of a stream of flying kicks and rolling dives: they stand on the spot, and Madhu turns his hips while Sajeev rotates his rib cage. The men's blank faces reveal little about what has motivated this shift from martial movements to gyrations – nor what impels their convulsions in “Duet,” or their embrace in “Soul.” Their neutral expressions might suggest an absence of motivation, or its concealment.

The abstraction of *The Sound of Silence* gives space for a range of interpretations of the production. In India, abstraction in contemporary dance productions invites criticism of the dancers' cultural integrity. Indian classical dancers Prakriti Kashyap, Nandini Ramani, and V P Dhananjayan each suggest that companies such as Samudra use abstraction to make their work appealing to producers and audiences of Western contemporary dance (Kashyap 2006; Ramani 2006; Dhananjayan 2006). At a conference in Chennai, in 2005, renowned *bharatanāṭyam* dancer Alarmel Valli described contemporary Indian dance as displaying a “Western modern aesthetic, modified by a sprinkling of Indian ‘ingredients’” (Valli 2005:46). Indian classical aesthetics prime critics and audiences to expect performers to use bold facial expressions, as prescribed in Bharata's treatise for theatre *The Nāṭyaśāstra*. Indian contemporary dance often frustrates this anticipation. Zarrilli, who has studied *kathakālī*, describes his response when he saw Chandralekha's dancers perform without such expression:

I responded with a conflicted sense of admiration for the precision and beauty of the bodywork, the execution of forms drawn from *bharatanāṭyam* and *kālarippayaṭṭu* [...] but also a sense of disappointment that the work seemed to stop with the bodies. The dancers never seemed to allow a sense of personal engagement behind the vacancy of the eyes to enter their potentially expressive faces – *abhinaya* (expressive artistry) seemed to be faceless. (Zarrilli 1997:144).

Malayāli *bharatanāṭyam* dancer Rajashree Warriar expresses the same concern about Samudra's performances (Warriar 2006). Yet it might be argued that Samudra's martial dance theatre, rather than departing from Indian aesthetic precedents, places a new emphasis on *nṛtta* – abstract dance movement. In her book *The Square and the Circle* Kapila Vatsyayan

states that the visual imperatives of Vedic aesthetics depersonalize the human body to the point of geometrical abstraction (Vatsyayan 1983:57). The objective of this process says Bose in her book *Speaking of Dance* is “not to convey meaning but to produce beauty” (Bose 2001:15).

Contrary arguments might describe Samudra’s abstraction as evidence of the company’s adherence to either Western or Indian aesthetics, but their impassive expressions might also be considered a protective device. Their blank faces might suggest that Madhu and Sajeev are concealing the motivations and emotions connected to their movements and their interactions. *The Sound of Silence* presents many occasions in which Madhu and Sajeev’s dance intimately together. Their faces, however, rarely communicate anything about their experience in these moments. The men neither adopt the codified expressions stipulated in *The Nāṭyaśāstra* nor present naturalistic (or spontaneous) expressions either. Their impassive faces prevent the audience seeing anything that the dancers might know about themselves and their work, including its erotic potential. The dancers never acknowledge that what Foster calls “the logics of sexual desire” may be in play (Foster 2001:182).

Foster describes how Cunningham’s abstraction “perpetuated the tradition of nonsexual dancing” (Foster 2001:175). She analyses a film of him making new work with two dancers – Sandra Neels (a white woman) and Gus Solomons (a black man). When Neels lies on top of Solomons, Foster notes that Cunningham’s choreographic process ignores the differences of gender – and ethnicity and race – that distinguish the pair: “Their intimate coupling is treated as one of an infinite number of positions that the body can inhabit” (Foster 2001:174). Madhu and Sajeev’s impassive faces, during such moments as their embrace in “Soul,” might be seen to key their intimate couplings in a similar nonsexual way. Their omission of facial expressions mean that the homoerotic connotation present in the

homosociality of their duets is not declared. But neither is it denied: it remains inexplicit, and somewhat disavowed.

The closeting effect of Samudra's abstraction may be seen to have had a different impact in the UK than it might have had in India. In particular, Madhu and Sajeev's impassive faces did not necessarily contain the sexuality of their dance. Western contemporary dance rarely includes the bold facial expressions – or mimetic movements and codified gestures – found in Indian performance. UK audiences are familiar with developing a personal interpretation of abstract dance. What is more, while Cunningham's choreographic processes (evolved in the 60s) continue to shape many contemporary dancers' work, sexual mores have so changed that Western audiences are now familiar with acknowledging the expression of diverse sexualities in such abstract dance. Furthermore, factors that in India may have keyed Samudra's martial dance theatre as abstract contributed in the UK more to the exotic dimensions of their performance and their stage personae. In Britain, the company's combative actions, slow motion movements and martial artists' loincloths evoked ideas of the primitive Other that Torgovnick describes, on to whom – amongst other attributes – sexual excess, and deviance, may be projected.

Samudra's abstraction may not have removed the potential eroticism of their martial dance theatre in the UK. However, the men's impassive faces and distant gazes keyed their dance as suitable for British producers and audiences not comfortable with promoting sexualised Orientalism or a neo-colonial gaze. Except for brief instances, like Madhu's smile at the end of "Rhythm," Samudra did not meet their British audience with a look that might close the circuit of desire that Lieppe-Levinson says strippers' eye contact creates (Lippe-Levinson 2002:120). The dancers' neutral expressions keyed their dance as abstract, empty of any content (erotic or otherwise) other than that which the audience might choose to publicly

declare, or privately conceal. *The Sound of Silence* might be watched as abstract contemporary Indian dance, but enjoyed as a primitivist exotic-erotic spectacle.

Foster proposes that when dancers' performances are seen as religious expression their immersion in corporeality is keyed as something other than an indulgence in sensuality and eroticism. She develops this argument by looking at Ruth St Denis' performances before European and American audiences in the 1930s. Foster says:

[St Denis'] reviews often commented on the quantity of exposed midriff but went on to stress the spiritual essence of her dancing. To portray religiosity on stage and to do so convincingly provided the ultimate refutation of any sexual innuendo. Yes, viewers might have reasoned, she danced the pilgrimage of an Eastern not Christian devotee, but all religions shared a dedication to spiritual rather than carnal experience (Foster 2001:153-4).

Samudra's performance might be seen to emphasise the erotic potential of both classical Indian dance and sculpture, somewhat nullifying both the value of their classicism and spirituality as closeting devices. There are other aspects of *The Sound of Silence*, however, that might be seen to key Samudra's martial dance theatre as an expression of Hindu religious experience, thus potentially closeting its erotic aspects.

In *The Sound of Silence* Samudra dance choreography that resembles *haṭha-yoga asana*. In one section the whole company join together to perform slow motion movements while the singer incants the *Gāyatrī mantra*.⁵ Indian audiences recognise this verse as an invocation with soteriological power, and foreign audiences may be assumed to identify such intoning as a part of Indian religious practices. To the sound of the *mantra*, Samudra move slowly through a series of geometric shapes. With the opening "Aum," they balance on one leg, arms stretched upwards and palms pressed together in prayer. During the next phrases they extend and lower their raised legs, then turn upstage and adopt their wide squatting stance. Their actions are consummately controlled and in time with the rhythm of the chanting. The dancers appear mindful and reverent, and their movement seems ceremonial. A

⁵ "We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds." (Vivekananda and Patañjali 1920).

similar juxtaposition of sacred sound and postural sequences, like *asana*, also occurs later in *The Sound of Silence*, when Samudra dance to the sustained drone of a long pipe. This instrument is an innovation of the company's musicians, but classical Indian music compositions are all elaborations of such a ground tone, which is called the *śruti*. The *śruti* has a spiritual significance in India as a cipher for the immutable continuum behind all existence, which is described in the Veda.

Samudra's careful progression through expansive body shapes to the accompaniment of *mantra* and the *śruti* reinforces similarities between their choreography and *haṭha-yoga*. *Haṭha-yoga* is a *sādhana* (spiritual path). It immerses participants in bodily experience, but its ultimate objective is to facilitate participants' transcendence of physicality – including sexuality – and build a lucid awareness of the passing moment, and the eternal, spiritual Present. In the introduction to her translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sutra*, Barbara Stoller Miller says “the aim of yoga is to eliminate the control that material nature exerts over the human spirit” (Miller 1996:1). To this end the sutra prescribes the sublimation of sexual energy, stating: “When one observes celibacy, heroic energy accrues” (Miller 1996:54). Bose describes the *bharatanāṭyam* dancer's movements as an offering of devotion – a moving meditation (Bose 2001:74). In *When the Body becomes All Eyes* Zarrilli explains that CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* develops meditative presence: “My body and mind were being [...] ‘cultivated’ toward engagement in the present moment, not toward an end or goal” (Zarrilli 1998:21). *Kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and *bharatanāṭyam* have distinct martial and aesthetic objectives, but in the contexts in which Madhu and Sajeew studied each discipline – and those in which I have trained – emphasis was placed upon their value as *sādhana*, closely comparable to *haṭha-yoga*.

In a physical practice undertaken as *sādhana*, the keying of corporeal actions as spiritual deeds might be seen to create a gap between appearance and intention of the kind

that Bateson finds in play, fantasy and threat. The actions of *haṭha-yoga*, *bharatanāṭyam* and *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* have a special interior denotative value divergent from their superficial appearance: an *asana* is more than a stretch, *nṛtta* is not only pretty, and *meippayaṭṭu* are more than kicks, jumps, and turns. When actions are given special value as *sādhana*, in the conservative climate of modern Kerala it might also be suggested that their value as a source of sensual experience is set aside. Samudra's martial dance theatre could be considered a synthesis of *sādhana* in which practitioners' evolve a deep engagement with the body in order to discipline and transcend it. The tensions inherent in this process might be seen to create an ambivalent relationship to corporeality, and sexuality in particular, which inflects Samudra's performance in *The Sound of Silence*. The yogic element in the movement disciplines from which their martial dance theatre is created may have led them to evolve displays of their bodies in which suggestions of sexuality are ever present but reflexively disattended by the dancers.

Samudra's slow transition through expansive postures to the sound of *mantra* and *śruti*, may suggest that, like meditative yogis, the dancers pursue divine knowledge through bodily movements. However, this progression also parades their martial physiques – developed through a decade of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* training. Moreover, this way of moving is vastly informed by Samudra's attention to aesthetic line, learnt through participation in *bharatanāṭyam*. Samudra's performance uses the extended postures and slow motion movements of *haṭha-yoga* to create a display of their bodies – one that has an erotic potential. But this borrowing also invests their martial dance theatre with a yogic demeanour – a religiosity – that closets the erotic implications of their performance.

This duality is evident in "Duet." This section features recognizable *asana*, but it is not a *haṭha-yoga* sequence. The postures were selected by Samudra for their aesthetic qualities, not their holistic properties. Moreover, Madhu and Sajeev do not sustain the steady,

slow motion that is intrinsic to *haṭha-yoga*. Instead they use it as a base tempo to which they return after climactic moments, energizing their dance with dynamic contrasts of speed. For example, midway through “Duet” the violin reaches a frenzied crescendo. Madhu and Sajeev spin rapidly, repeatedly falling and rising again from the floor. An explosive climax seems immanent. Then the violinist resumes a legato motif, and Madhu and Sajeev recommence their careful progression through slow poses. Having executed an exciting bodily display, suggesting ecstatic abandon, they recover a yogic demeanour. Their impassive faces, distant gaze and slow expansive movements imply that they are focussed wholly on soteriological matters. The moments of frenzy seem forgotten; the excitement of their corporeality is somehow disattended.

It is important to note that it was Chandralekha who introduced the use of prolonged slow motion, as seen in *The Sound of Silence*, into Indian contemporary dance. In his book *Chandralekha*, Bharucha observes that her signature use of *vilambit kaal* (slow tempo) gave audiences the opportunity to see “every tension and flexion” of the dancers’ movements (Bharucha 1995:192). The sexualising quality of slow motion in film and television is discussed by John Fiske in his book *Television Culture*, and his observations might be seen to offer insights into Chandralekha’s use of *vilambit kaal*. Fiske says slow motion in action drama serves “to eroticize power, to extend the moment of climax,” and in sport it is used “to celebrate and display the male body in action, to produce a sense of awe by making the physical performance appear beautiful” (Fiske 1987:219). *Vilambit kaal* might be seen to contribute to the abstraction of Samudra’s martial dance theatre. It removes the dynamic of changing rhythm. It places emphasis instead on the paths of their limbs, and the silhouettes created by their bodies. At the same time, however, it exposes every muscular shift and eroticises and celebrates the men’s corporeality. Samudra’s progression through *asana* in the

tempo of *vilambit kaal* creates moments of the synthesis that Chandralekha sought. Sexuality, sensuality and spirituality are simultaneously evoked and intermingled.

Foster suggests that intertwined in the religiosity of St Denis' dance was an Orientalism that made her performances a variation on "standard exoticist entertainment":

St Denis, an amalgam of orientalist types incarnate, bolstered nationalist and racist discourses [...] through her effective appropriation of other dance traditions. Tapping America's extensive interest in religious experimentation, the impetus to reevaluate the spiritual practices in the light of new exposure to world religions, St. Denis choreographed religious quests set in exotic Asian lands (Foster 2001:153).

How might the exoticism, and particularly the primitivist aesthetic, of *The Sound of Silence* closet the potential eroticism of Samudra's martial dance theatre?

When performed anywhere outside of Kerala, including in other Indian states, Samudra's martial dance theatre presents as exotic – perhaps in the special sense that Balme uses this word, but certainly in the ways implied by its everyday usage. The music, movement and costuming of *The Sound of Silence* keys the production as a contemporary expression of South India's Dravidian culture, and of Kerala's distinctive traditions in particular. The region that is now Kerala is celebrated within India for its unique continuation of pre-Vedic ritualised performance. Significantly, Kerala's culture differs greatly from the Hindustani-Mughal culture of the northern plains and New Delhi, where India's national arts bodies have their headquarters. Indeed, Delhi's history as capital of the British Raj and its present-day cosmopolitanism have inflected the city and its ruling elite with a international outlook, informed by, if not allied with, a Eurocentric perspective. The exotic appeal of Samudra's martial dance theatre, for both North Indians and international audiences, has secured the attention of important Delhi agencies, and state funding for foreign tours of *The Sound of Silence*.

The allocation of such support to Samudra's martial dance theatre instead of female *bharatanāṭyam* dancers might suggest the diminished hold of the Indian patriarchal values and Eurocentric exoticism that (suggest Chandralekha and Ratnam, among others) made such

women the national totemic doll. However, it might also imply – to combine Lee and Balme’s analyses – that changes in international relations have resulted in the demand for new Indian fetishes, with an exotic mimetic value like that of *bharatanāṭyam* but meeting different market needs. Samudra’s choreographic use of the Malayāḷi discipline of *kaḷarippayattu* could suggest the company’s promotion of regionalism. Their Delhi support, however, may imply that this statement has been co-opted by the central state agencies to promote the nation’s pluralism. Lee’s terms of analysis seem pertinent here: Samudra’s martial dance theatre might be seen to create a corporeal style whose “radical” nativist value also makes it valuable to India’s “exploitative” centralist systems (Lee 2001:78).

Importantly, *The Sound of Silence* may be seen to provide Delhi agencies with male dance with an erotic potential framed, and explained, as a trait of the company’s regional indigeneity. The erotic potential of Chandralekha and Sheth’s works might be perceived as an expression of these North Indian women’s dissenting feminism, and an aspect of their avant-garde primitivist aesthetic. Samudra, however, are Malayāḷi men, and the erotic potential of their martial dance theatre might be considered an innate aspect of their culture. The sexualised and primitivist aesthetic of their work might be seen as nativist expression. Examining the distinctions, and similarities, between Samudra’s martial dance theatre and Chandralekha and Sheth’s works, helps reveal how the companies nativism – which evokes Indian and Eurocentric primitivist tropes – may make the company’s work more suitable for, or susceptible to, adoption by Delhi’s apparatchiks than the work of these pioneering women.

In *Gone Primitive* Torgovnick says:

Primitives are our untamed selves, or id forces – libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, parts of its harmonies. Primitives are free. (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Indian discourse attributes the primitivist tropes she describes to Kerala’s lower castes to which Madhu and Sajeev belong. In his essay, “Sarpam Tullal: A Ritualistic Performance of

Kerala,” Vyala Vasudevan Pillai considers how these Kerala communities have been stereotyped, by other communities in Kerala and India. He says:

The folk living close to nature, following their instinctive ways in habitual conditions prescribed by the wild earth, sky and all other natural elements, were branded as untouchable, black, primitive and uncivilised (Pillai 2006:29).

He also suggests that these communities have been ascribed a connection to a “dark force” or “primaeval energy,” which their artistic traditions perpetuate and display (Pillai 2006:30).

Samudra’s incorporation of *kaḷarippayattu* in *The Sound of Silence* (though the discipline is the hereditary preserve of the warrior caste) contributes to their martial dance theatre achieving an aesthetic evocative of such primitivist characterisations of lower caste Malayāli culture. Madhu and Sajeev’s engagement with this antiquated means of hand-to-hand warfare implies that they are part of a substratum of modern society, where pre-industrial life and values continue.

Samudra’s use of *kaḷarippayattu* to create new dance makes *The Sound of Silence* closely comparable to Sheth’s productions (in which Madhu and Sajeev danced) and also those of Chandralekha, whose lead Sheth might be seen to follow. Through their collaboration with *kaḷarippayattu* practitioners, Chandralekha and Sheth invested their work with primal qualities more readily evoked by martial Malayāli men than North Indian classical dancers such as themselves. Chandralekha’s seminal rekeying of *kaḷarippayattu* as dance theatre was part of her response to Devi’s rekeying of *dāsīattam* as *bharatanāṭyam*. Chandralekha stopped dancing *bharatanāṭyam* because she felt it propagated a patriarchal image of Indian women that opposed any exploration of Hindu understandings of the interconnections linking spirituality, female sexuality and the irrepressible force of Nature. She turned to *kaḷarippayattu* to aid her choreographic depiction of such themes and imagery. Paradoxically, Chandralekha incorporated *kaḷarippayattu* practitioners into her choreography because the attributes of these men’s corporeal style helped her explore the archetypically female.

It might be argued that Chandralekha and Sheth's productions elaborate the intrinsic 'femininity' of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, Zarrilli reports that masters understand the discipline to awaken in practitioners a cosmic force called *śakti*, which they conceptualise as the "dangerous, unstable feminine energy" that pervades nature (Zarrilli 1998:70). Bharucha says, in *Chandralekha*, that Chandralekha's choreography emphasised the way in which in *meippayāṭṭu* "one movement is already flowing into the next even while it is being performed," giving the discipline an "*organicity*" (Bharucha 1995:151 [italics in original]). He later explains that she equated femininity with a "sensuous and pliant energy, which animates the body within a circular form" (Bharucha 1995:253). Bharucha's analysis suggests that Chandralekha's choreography sought to reveal an intrinsic connection between the principles of movement empowering *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* and a sensibility that might be considered archetypically feminine – the pervasive force of *śakti*.

However, Chandralekha's – and subsequently Sheth's – framing of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as part of feminist, and sexualised, dance theatre contradicts the martial art's positioning in present-day India, as an idealised expression of a heteronormative, heroic Malayāḷi masculinity. Chandralekha's productions were seen to key the participating male *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioners as sexually amorphous, and possibly homosexual. In a 2003 newspaper interview she described her production *Raag*, in unsensational and conceptual terms, as "exploring the feminine side in men" (Merzenich 2009). But Chatterjea reports in her book *Butting Out* that New York critics lampooned the production as the "gay Kamasutra" (Chatterjea 2004:292). Ein Lall's film *Sharira: Chandralekha's Explorations in Dance* shows choreography of the sort that prompted such comment. Two young *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioners – dressed in *leṅgoṭṭi* – hold one another face-to-face, and move slowly, in perfect accord, gazing into each other's eyes (Lall 2003).

By incorporating *kaḷarippayattu* practitioners in their feminist explorations of sexuality and gender, Chandralekha and Sheth keyed their male compatriots as embodiments of feminine concerns. They potentially feminised – or queered – these men. Interestingly, this is a rekeying more ordinarily seen to arise from Western, patriarchal primitivism. Torgovnick identifies that the tropes of this discourse may define the non-Western man as indivisible from the feminine uncivilised collective to which he belongs; he is positioned as the opposite Other of the masculine Western man who is civilised and individuated (Torgovnick 1997:14). Samudra's male-led, Malayāḷi development of Chandralekha and Sheth's use of *kaḷarippayattu* to create dance makes their martial dance theatre a masculinist-nativist reiteration of these women's feminist-primitivist aesthetic.

Chandralekha and Sheth's staging of *kaḷarippayattu* could be seen as the appropriation of this Malayāḷi discipline by women from upper caste North Indian communities. Madhu and Sajeev, however, are low caste Malayāḷi men. This keys their staging of *kaḷarippayattu* as a nativist promotion of Malayāḷi traditional and custom, and an expression of regionalism. As a nativist production, *The Sound of Silence* enjoys a different cultural position – in India and beyond – than that afforded to Chandralekha and Sheth's primitivist productions. The nativist aspect of *The Sound of Silence*, to use Goffman's terms, shapes the 'rim' of the production: it shapes the relationship of Samudra's martial dance theatre to activities outside of this frame – the wider socio-political Indian and global context (Goffman 1975:156).

Comparison of Samudra's martial dance theatre with *teyyam*, a ritual performance peculiar to Kerala, helps to explore how *The Sound of Silence* may be both an expression of Malayāḷi nativism and a production that accommodates a primitivist gaze. *Teyyam* is valued as a totemic expression of native Malayāḷi culture. It is Kerala's oldest extant example of the use of *kaḷarippayattu* to create spectacular performance. Mediums train in the martial art to

gain strength enough to wear their huge costumes and sustain their long performances, and also to acquire an explosive movement vocabulary with which to express the ferocity of the local heroic deities they embody. The enactment of *teyyam* is the preserve of men from the specific lower caste community to which Madhu belongs. In their role as mediums, says Dilip M. Menon in his essay “Intimations of Equality: Shrines and Politics in Malabar, 1900-1924,” these men become “temporarily superior” to all their compatriots (Menon 1993:256).

In the penultimate section of *The Sound of Silence*, called “Trance,” Madhu presents a solo dance that replicates the aesthetic, and, in condensed form, the developmental progression of a *teyyam* performance. Madhu wears a red skirt and a scarlet and yellow half-mask, and he brandishes blooms from the coconut tree. He stamps the ground to the accelerating beat of a *chenda* – the double ended drum that is used to accompany *teyyam*, and much of Samudra’s dancing in *The Sound of Silence*. Madhu’s movements increase in speed and scale until he is leaping from side to side with high scissor jumps. The flowers he holds spray the stage with seeds as Madhu spins, until he falls into a flamboyant collapse.

Teyyam is situated at a complex junction of pre-Vedic and Hindu spirituality, and historic and contemporary social forces. On every level its symbolism is arcane and complex. Its costumes include giant headdresses. Its complex make-up involves prosthetic noses and beards and metallic goggles. But its ritual performances have an arresting spectacular appeal and an anarchic edge. In trance the mediums vacillate between stately reserve and outbursts of ferocious anger. In his essay, “Towards a Phenomenology of Indian Disciplines of Practice: Meditational, Martial and Performative,” Zarrilli observes that many of Kerala’s traditional performance forms, such as *teyyam*, display a unique mix of attributes ordinarily partitioned in India as being *mārgā* or *deśi*. Zarrilli elaborates these terms in a particular way: the “classical” (*mārgā*) he connects to “control,” and the “folk” (*deśi*) he links with “frenzied release” (Zarrilli 1998b:173). Samudra’s choreographic integration of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*,

bharatanāṭyam and *haṭha-yoga* – and *teyyam* – may create in their martial dance theatre a comparable balance of restraint and abandon. The *mārgā* aspects of abstraction and virtuosity in *The Sound of Silence* hold in balance the *deśi* traits of eroticism and individualistic innovation evident in Samudra’s martial dance theatre. The company’s performance, like *teyyam*, bridges Indian aesthetic divisions in a way peculiar to Kerala’s culture, making it uniquely appealing to a range of domestic audiences. Moreover, the control and release of their performance creates a balance comparable to the hot interior and cold exterior of the ‘cool’ aesthetic discussed in Chapter One, now globally recognised and internationally valued.

My consideration of the Malayāḷi nativism of Samudra’s martial dance theatre is prompted by its affinities to *teyyam*, and its prominent use of *kaḷarippayattu*, but also by Madhu’s discourse about *The Sound of Silence*. Madhu describes the production as an expression of the rural, labouring, lower caste culture to which he and Sajeew belong. After a performance of *The Sound of Silence* in Chennai in 2006, he told the audience that Samudra dance with “farmers’ bodies.”⁶ At a symposium in New Zealand in 2008, he described Samudra as “Sons of the Soil” (Gopinath 2008). Describing *The Sound of Silence* as a work created and performed by lower caste Malayāḷi men positions the production in particular ways in Kerala, and India. It labels Samudra’s martial dance theatre as an expression of vernacular culture, which democratic political discourse seeks to afford greater status. And it identifies the company’s work as part of Kerala’s particularly unique and respected regional culture. In performance, the *teyyam* medium becomes superior to his compatriots. In a similar inversion, the keying of Samudra’s martial dance theatre as part of Malayāḷi lower caste culture grants the company prestige and support usually allocated only to classical dance

⁶ Samudra: *The Sound of Silence* (Chennai: Narada Gana Sabha, 12 December 2006).

forms. And at the same time it enables Samudra to depart from the chaste aesthetic values of these classical idioms.

When Madhu describes *The Sound of Silence* as an expression of Samudra's indigenous culture his comments are driven by a nativist pride, but Pillai's analysis, in his essay "Sarpam Tullal," points to how outsiders' understandings of Madhu and Sajeev's natal communities may be more ambivalent. A primitivist discourse in India connects these communities to darkness and the *primaeval*, nature and instinct (Pillai 2006:29-30). When in Western nations, Samudra's combative, mystic and sensual performance evokes a less specific, but more pervasive, Eurocentric primitivism of the kind that Torgovnick analyses.

In the cosmopolitan Indian and Western cities in which Samudra perform, their commitment to nativism evokes primitivist concepts that confuse gender and sexual norms. Madhu and Sajeev's performance of *meippayāṭṭu* may key them as aggressive and reticent, affirming ideals of heteronormative masculinity, but when they breach gender norms through their performance of feminine *bharatanāṭyam* or androgynous *haṭha-yoga* – or their confusion of all three disciplines – it is excused as 'natural'. As wild and mystical 'natives', Madhu and Sajeev are outside the ruling patriarchy of India, and that of the West even more so. They are always already potentially feminised by this exclusion, but as primitives they are also outside the bounds governing the segregation of the sexual, sensual and spiritual. They are not expected to conform, to heteronormative behaviours or any usual norms. They are beyond rebuke. Foster considers how the exoticism of St Denis' dance may have closeted the eroticism of her dance. The primitivist aesthetic of Samudra's martial dance theatre can be seen to license, rather than closet, their potential eroticism as naïve – as an attribute innate to such men as they.

Samudra developed *The Sound of Silence* in relationship to the complex negotiation between an ancient culture and a modernising society that shapes Kerala's, and India's, public

life. In doing so, their martial dance theatre might be seen to have formed in such a way as to be also exotic performance – in Balme’s sense – suited for Western stages. When Samudra present *The Sound of Silence* in India, they perform their martial dance theatre in a traditional society ordered by caste, and an artistic arena stratified by the categories of *mārgā* and *deśi*. What is more they do so in a modern secular nation whose class mobility is constantly adapting the structure of these hierarchies and their relationships to one another. The complex interplay of these issues can be seen in the ambiguous status of Madhu and Sajeev’s display of their near-naked bodies.

On the one hand, Madhu and Sajeev’s bodily exhibition encounters contemporary values that define public nakedness as un-Indian, as Mitra explains in “Living a Body Myth” (Mitra 1984:77). Though strict censorship laws that once applied in India have been relaxed Bhaichand Patel notes that “nudity remains the final taboo” in Bollywood films, which otherwise borrow freely from Hollywood (Patel 2008: 58). Kapoor’s dance in his sheer sarong in *Saawariya* is the exception that exceeds the usual constraints: male stars may remove their shirts, but not their trousers. In addition to the sexual connotations of their bodily display, Madhu and Sajeev’s performance encounters historical values that associate public nakedness with low social status. For example, G. Krishnan Nadar’s pamphlet “Downtrodden Movements in Kerala” explains that until the twentieth century lower caste communities (including Madhu and Sajeev’s) were compelled to remove upper clothing when in the presence of social superiors (Nadar 2007:17). Today in India, it remains the poorly paid and low status labourers whose bodies are most often bared in daily public life.

On the other hand, Samudra’s undress could be compared to that of men engaged in *sattva* activities. For example, Malayāli men undress to take ritual baths at temples, and bare their chests when making obeisance to temple idols. But the *kaḷari* is the public place in which Malayāli men are most naked in one another’s company. And like the devotee at the

temple, or the practitioner of *haṭha-yoga*, the *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioner's nakedness does not have 'lowly' connotations. It is understood to be a necessity of his training and furthermore, it is spiritualised by the ritual observances that sanctify the *kaḷari* and the practices conducted therein. It is a part of his *sādhana*.

Samudra's wearing of *leṅgoṭṭi* could be seen as a necessity allowing them the freedom to execute their *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* movements. But the company dance on stages that lack both the privacy and sanctity of the *kaḷari*. As such, Samudra's martial dance theatre reframes *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* in a way that may reveal the *sattva* martial art's potential as a *tamas* erotic display of male bodies. Perhaps, however, the spiritual aspects of *The Sound of Silence* 'clothes' Samudra, making their bodily display somewhat reconciled with Kerala's conservative society.

The way in which Samudra's bodily display intercepts, and balances, traditional and contemporary values and interests is indicative of the same negotiation that surrounds *The Sound of Silence* as a whole. Both V.P. Dhananjayan, in his book *Beyond Performing Art*, and Chitra Swaminathan, writing in *The Hindu* newspaper, note that because there is an ever growing number of professionally trained *bharatanāṭyam* dancers – and practitioners of other classical forms – only a tiny percentage can make a living performing (Dhananjayan 2007:23; Swaminathan 2006:4). Samudra's domestic performance calendar indicates that their innovative martial dance theatre enables them to keep working in a saturated domestic market.

On the one hand, *The Sound of Silence* is well received by Indian audiences because Samudra's martial dance theatre is more accessible than *mārgā* dance forms such as *bharatanāṭyam*. *Bharatanāṭyam* is considered *mārgā* because it uses a fixed system of rhythmic and melodic forms, codified hand gestures and facial expressions, and scriptural themes. In *Beyond Performing Art*, Dhananjayan speaks of *bharatanāṭyam* as possessing "a

prescribed grammar with poetical suggestiveness” (Dhananjayan 2007:77). In Anita Nair’s novel, *Mistress*, the *kathakali* artist Konan says succinctly, “Classical art requires an effort from the audience” (Nair 2006:417). In her book *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* Vatsyayan acknowledges that modern Indian audiences “remain somewhat baffled” by classical dance because it “derives from traditions to which they have no ready access” (Vatsyayan 1968:23). Today, forty years on from the publication of Vatsyayan’s comments, the situation is even more so.

In his book *Being Indian: The Truth about why the Twenty-First Century will be India’s* Pavan K. Varma says Bollywood is “inclusive for its deliberate avoidance of highbrow aesthetics” (Varma 2004:155). The physical virtuosity and abstract movement in *The Sound of Silence* might be said to give Samudra’s martial dance theatre a similar appeal. An audience need have no familiarity with complex codes, such as those that govern classical dance, to enjoy the production. Madhu and Sajeev impress with their sudden falls from precarious headstands, and their flying and spinning kicks. Their movements appear to meet no resistance: they seem to move in a frictionless space. Journalist Suma Varughese describes Samudra as being “so lithe and effortless, so fluid and weightless, that they almost seemed divested of body” (Varughese 2007). Like circus, *The Sound of Silence* has a ‘Wow!’ factor. It is this that accounts for much of what Madhu calls the production’s ‘universal appeal’ (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006).

Bollywood appeals directly to its global mass audience. Samudra, however, depend on bookings from a network of producers in India and abroad. The success of *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to arise from the production’s balance of cultural specificity and elemental spectacle. Its nativist integration of *meippayāṭṭu*, *nṛtta*, and *asana* (and aspects of *teyyam*) makes it fit to occupy a platform ordinarily allocated to totemic forms such as *bharatanāṭyam*. At the same time, its circus-like appeal and evocation of a primitivist

aesthetic makes it attractive for audiences uneducated in the codes of classical Indian dance, but with an appetite for Indian dance.

Samudra's fulfilment of this role within India implicates their martial dance theatre in a negotiation between tradition and modernity that is connected to social mobility and the replacement of caste boundaries with those of class. In his book *Natural Hierarchies: The Historical Sociology of Race and Caste* Chris Smaje states: "The word 'caste' itself is Portuguese in origin, and it is usually regarded as a conflation of two different indigenous terms, *jati* and *varna*" (Smaje 2000:13). *Varna* is a concept, laid out in Hindu scripture, which determines a hierarchy of four social categories, connected to *guna*. Each family belongs to one *varna*, and this status is hereditary. For example, *Brahmin* priests who are the highest caste attend the temple idols, which is a *sattva* occupation. *Shudra* who are the lowest caste are allocated employment such as street sweeping, a *tamas* activity. The four *varna* are subdivided further into *jati*.

T. J. Nossiter reports that Swami Vivekananda, during a visit to what is now Kerala, described the region as "a mad-house of caste" because of the rigid customs policing interaction between its innumerable *jati* (Nossiter 1982:26). Perhaps as a consequence of this complex system, there have been effective social reform movements in the region since the early twentieth century, when the influential Sree Narayana Guru preached "one god, one religion, one caste" (Mammen 1981:53).⁷ Furthermore, Dilip M. Menon, in his book *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, states that since Indian independence Kerala's powerful communist party, which is often in government, has determinedly championed "a doctrine of caste equality" (Menon 1994:2). On the one hand, it could be said that Samudra's martial dance theatre was created in an egalitarian social context. Yet the majority of Kerala's Hindu marriages (including those of Madhu and

⁷ Sree Narayana Guru (b.1856 - d.1928).

Sajeev's families) are carefully arranged according to caste. As such, Samudra's martial dance theatre evolved in a society where social change is championed, but hereditary hierarchies persist.

The traditional hierarchical structures of caste – underpinned by concepts of *guṇa* and interconnected to the aesthetic categories of *mārgā* and *deśi* – have been complicated by India's modernisation. The emergence of an educated, affluent and influential middle class (drawn from various *jati*) has invested 'traditional' values with new contemporary significance. Edicts that once maintained a rigid societal order have been adopted and adapted by individuals and communities seeking upward social mobility and 'respectability'. In particular, people not born *Brahmin* have sought to increase their association with prestigious *sattva* activities.

Zarrilli notes the influence of class ambitions in the Malayāḷi discourse pertaining to *kaḷarippayattu*. He says that contemporary descriptions of the discipline as a 'traditional' *sattva* art may cite brahmanical ideals but are driven by "class considerations" (Zarrilli 1998:223). Indian dance scholars suggest a comparable negotiation with tradition in the cultural positioning of contemporary Indian dance. Shovana Narayan in her monograph *Performing Arts in India: A Policy Perspective* says that the artistic experimentation of such new dance is "oriented towards the urban middle class" (Narayan 2003:72). In her doctoral thesis, Uttara Asha Coorlawala suggests that this social group want performance that is accessible and speaks to their contemporary concerns, but the influence of Hindutva (Hindu nativist) politicians leads them to seek out work that presents as traditionally Indian. In this situation, she says, contemporary dancers are required to participate in a "re-invention of tradition" (Coorlawala 1994:122).

In the saturated Indian dance market, where many 'professionals' rarely get paid, a contemporary dance work like *The Sound of Silence* must engage with the values of the fee

paying patrons and producers, and the middle class audiences whom these people seek to entertain. Samudra's martial dance theatre is appreciated by an Indian public who are more familiar with Bollywood than *bharatanāṭyam*. Yet the company also fulfils the desires of these people to see performance that appears to preserve Indian heritage, and the desires of the company's patrons' and producers to connect their name with such a presentation. Samudra's innovative martial dance theatre might be seen to offer 'accessible tradition'.

Importantly, accommodating the Indian middle class appetite for tradition and modernity can also be seen to have readied Samudra's martial dance theatre for the international market. In Western contexts, such as the UK, alterity is valued but commercial criteria militate against cultural differences that make a work inaccessible to a general audience. When exported, Samudra's syncretic blend of tradition and modernity is rekeyed as the pairing of the strange and familiar that Balme identifies as pivotal to intercultural theatre. In this analysis, *The Sound of Silence* acquired its potential exotic mimetic value as a consequence of Samudra's engagement with their domestic Indian audiences.

The closeted sexuality of Samudra's martial dance theatre is also part of its domestic and foreign success. In *The Sound of Silence*, the company offer a spectacular display of male bodies whose implicit eroticism contributes to the production's modernity at home, and its familiarity overseas. In India, the performance's sexual connotations are contained by tradition. They are variously disavowed or licensed, ignored as incidental or explained as part of Tantra or native Malayāḷi culture. As such, they are acceptable to middle class audiences. Yet at the same time the (homo)erotic dimensions of the company's martial dance theatre makes it modern. It addresses an audience with changing sexual mores, as displayed by Bollywood's creation of films like *Saawariya*. In the UK, a similar process of disavowal and licence makes *The Sound of Silence* suited to a post-colonial Western audience, and the producers who develop programmes for them. Sensitised by the nation's multiculturalism,

such people might reject an explicitly erotic objectification of the non-Western performer as out-moded Orientalism, or lowbrow and popularist. Yet these reservations have not quashed the British appetite for the erotic exotic. The abstraction of Samudra's martial dance theatre, and the men's limited acknowledgement of their sexual appeal, means that *The Sound of Silence* can navigate these British inhibitions. At the same time, audiences are not prohibited from enjoying the production's visceral appeal, to which the men's martial Otherness adds the frisson of interracial difference and a potential confusion of gender roles. As warrior figures they affirm the heteronormative values of 'masculinity-as-activity' that Dyer considers. Inversely, as feminised primitives, such as Torgovnick describes, they may circumvent the anxieties that Burt says the Western male dancer stirs: they are always already outside Western gender norms.

In light of this discussion what might be explored, though it cannot be done so adequately here, is the debate between Indian classical and contemporary dancers about whose practice is, or is not, playing to a Eurocentric and eroticising gazer. The choreographic processes of Chandralekha and Sheth that Samudra employ are positioned as rejecting Devi's Eurocentric *bharatanāṭyam*. Yet perhaps they may be necessarily shaped to address a modern and somewhat Westernised India audience as well.

It remains to consider how Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to expand the inherent theatricality of their Malayāli martial art, *kaḷarippayattu*, as practiced since the 1930s. Samudra's martial dance theatre elides the combative utilitarian aspect of *meippayāṭtu* and emphasises instead the rhythmic and visual patterns of these drill in order to create dance. This might imply the company's departure from the combative imperatives that are, presumably, the core of *kaḷarippayattu*. However, Samudra may be seen to extend an inclination to aestheticisation that Zarrilli and MacDonald attribute to the CVN style of *kaḷarippayattu* in which Madhu and Sajeew trained.

In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, Zarrilli describes how in the 1930s Kottakal Karnaran and his principle student C.V. Narayanan Nayar⁸ (under whose son Madhu and Sajeev studied) created an amalgamation of northern Kerala's indigenous martial practices to revive interest in *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* (Zarrilli 1998:51). These drills, now known as CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* (an acronym of C.V. Narayanan Nayar's name) were formulated to foster a trainee's ergonomic efficiency, but they were also evolved as elegant movement forms for public display. Zarrilli says: "In the C.V.N. style, the sequences are dance-like in their gracious, undulating fluidity" (Zarrilli 1998:97). Similarly, in his journal article "Bodily Practice, Performance Art, Competitive Sport: A Critique of Kalaripayattu, the Martial Art of Kerala," which examines the *kaḷari* where Madhu and Sajeev trained, Ian McDonald says that the forms of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* "are closer to a graceful dance rather than self-defence techniques" (McDonald 2007:153). Indeed, P. Balakrishnan's English-language training manual for CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* repeatedly explains that certain movements add "grace" to a practitioner (Balakrishnan 1995).

These comments imply that CVN style *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* pursues an aesthetic imperative. The martial art is perhaps more akin to what Goffman calls the pictographic activity of dance – in which grace and economy of movement are paramount – than the utilitarian activity of boxing, in which (he says) these are marginal concerns. Zarrilli commits to this kind of analysis, with qualification, in *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*. He says in CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* "behind the fluid grace is the strength and power of movements which could, if necessary, be applied with lightning fast speed and precision" (Zarrilli 1998:97). However, he also states that a principal objective of the CVN style was to create a "set of theatrical techniques for public performances" that might revive interest in *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* (Zarrilli 1998:51). Moreover, he notes the success of this promotional venture. Within years

⁸ Kottakal Karnaran Gurukkal (1850-1935). CV Narayanan Nayar (1905-44).

of the formulation of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, demonstrations of its drills had become a key element of Kerala's major festivals. Furthermore, in the 1950s, says Zarrilli, when three Malayāḷi principalities were joined as Kerala, *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* became a "symbolic vehicle" for narration of a collective Malayāḷi ethnic identity (Zarrilli 1998:56). Zarrilli's history of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* suggests that while the CVN practice preserves the combative potential of antique techniques of warfare it also aestheticises them for use as a means of contemporary cultural expression. Samudra's rekeying of *meippayaṭṭu* in their martial dance theatre might be seen to extend this process, and bring attention to it.

It might also be suggested that Samudra's martial dance theatre exploits the value of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as a form of 'closeted' dance particularly suited for navigating the Western unease about male dance that Burt describes. CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* offers an aesthetic exhibition of men, but its martial component means that this exhibition presents as a display of 'masculinity-as-activity'. CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* prepares practitioners for martial tasks, but it is also a form of gymnastics evolved to command an audience's attention. Every kick, lunge or jump has a specific potential combative application, but at the same time each also affords the onlooker an immediate display of the practitioner's balance, strength and rhythmicity. It is also a demonstration of self-control. To perform *meipayyattū* a trainee musters power into his limbs, but he must also contain this force. For example, to achieve the flight required in *catipurumkal*, a practitioner must kick powerfully. Yet his foot will hit no opponent. The charge in his leg is not dispelled into another body, but must instead be reabsorbed. His kick's explosive power is checked by a myriad of minute muscular adjustments that sustain his balance. This process is a fundamental law of ergonomic movement, but in the presentation of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* it acquires a special significance. It makes the discipline a display of prowess held in perpetual abeyance. While practitioners in training may be oriented to a potential utilitarian objective, in the immediate moment they create a spectacle with a visceral

appeal, and a sensual and erotic potential. This duality is intrinsic to martial arts centred on pattern practice or intimidation displays. It is made especially evident by the theatrical staging of such activities.

Samudra's martial dance theatre emphasises the containment of force that CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* requires. In *The Sound of Silence*, Madhu and Sajeev seem to be 'holding back' a combative potential they might release in some 'real' context. In a nostalgic vein, it might be imagined that though these men's ancestors once dispelled such force, modern life prevents Madhu and Sajeev from doing so. Whatever interpretation is applied, Samudra's martial dance theatre seems to make distinct the inhibition of violence that is the central paradox of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, and all martial arts based on pattern practice. Moreover, inhibition is still required in full-contact fighting sports; rules always pertain. Indeed, even when sparring with weapons, a CVN practitioner is expected to protect and not injure his fellows.

Samudra's martial dance theatre extends the mimesis found in their martial art. It invites an audience to see that the 'would be' kicks and blows of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, like those seen in the company's performance, are never intended to become 'actual'. Bateson's discussion in "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" might suggest that the frame of the *kaḷari*, like the frame of Samudra's theatres, determines that these combative actions do not denote that which such actions would denote outside such a confine. What is more difficult to determine is whether the actions of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* are play, threat or fantasy – the keyings Bateson examines – or ritual, theatre, or some other kind of activity. Perhaps it is better to forego the definitive categorising that Bateson and Goffman's frame analyses seem to propose. Schechner's critique of Bateson's frame might suggest that *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* is caught in a net – not held in a frame (Schechner 1993:41). In this light, all of these labels might apply, in some degree, to the martial art's actions, at one and the same time.

It could be said that Samudra's presentation of *The Sound of Silence* in the UK, and other comparable Western nations, exploits the exotic mimetic capital value of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* to provide Western audiences with a spectacle of Other masculinity. Samudra's martial dance theatre may be seen to make the Malayāḷi *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioner, and most specifically his body, into what Lee calls a fetish, with both the economic and psychoanalytic implications that Lee intends this term to convey (Lee 2001:74). This engagement with commercial imperatives and Eurocentric fantasies seems at odds with the *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* practitioner's role as a totemic emblem of the Malayāḷi self-determination.

Zarrilli's book, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, positions *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as a contemporary figurehead of regional pride. Zarrilli says that public demonstrations of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, which began in the 1930s, established the martial art as presenting an "idealized image of Malayāḷi manhood" and a "reification of the martial spirit of old" (Zarrilli 1998:53). In the 1950s, when the language-state of Kerala was established, he says that *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* became the "primary symbol [of] a unified Malayali identity" (Zarrilli 1998:55). McDonald's article "Bodily Practice," published nine years after Zarrilli's book, suggests that the role of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* has shifted "from *developing* a Malayāḷi sense of cultural identity to *selling* this cultural identity as a response to the imperatives of global tourism" (McDonald 2007:166 [italics in original]). He implies that this change of focus means that the inner dimensions of the discipline have been jeopardised. He says that the martial art has become:

framed by the logic of the tourist trade wherein the process of commodification transforms the discipline of the *kaḷari* into byte-sized moments. Under such conditions *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* appears as an ephemeral and emasculated martial art, but one, nonetheless, that is suited to the transitory, fleeting and contingent gaze of the tourist" (McDonald 2007:160).

McDonald suggests that *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* once relocated outside "the sacred space of the *kaḷari*" – its defining frame – loses its essential identity and its internal coherence (McDonald 2007:160). Its rekeying as a gymnastic sport or tourist entertainment not only

adds a new lamination to the discipline, but also disturbs its innermost layer, which McDonald acknowledges is something betwixt combat and a “meditative quasi-spiritual experience” (McDonald 2007:143). In the sports arena and on the stage, precedence is given, he says, to “form and style over ritual and content” (McDonald 2007:160).

McDonald’s proposes that *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* might be an “unclassifiable” activity (McDonald 2007:142). Today, it may be practiced as *sādhana*, like *haṭha-yoga*, or a discipline like *iaido*, which – according to Klens-Bigman – is concerned with the preservation of a “potentially deadly practicality” (Klens-Bigman 2007). Such ambiguity or multivalence might be considered a result of the numerous rekeyings, or reclassifications, that have given rise to the contemporary discipline of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. These might be arranged in a chronological progression: ritual duel, martial art, festival display, sport, and tourist entertainment. Moreover, a further parallel list may be added which describe the martial discipline’s use in theatrical performance, as *teyyam*, *kathakaḷi*, and the contemporary dance of Chandralekha, Sheth and Samudra.

Using Goffman’s analysis, each subsequent keying or classification of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* might be seen to add its lamination to those proceeding. Schechner’s net, however, is a “flow-through container” (Schechner 1993:41). In his analysis, the keyings listed might be seen not as stable strata, separate and distinguishable from one another, but as interpenetrating, and simultaneously available, modes of engagement with the activity called *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. By calling *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* unclassifiable McDonald seems to acknowledge that all of these keyings or modes are to be considered *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. Yet, it seems that for him the tourist show is a lamination too far, distancing the practice from its source, or innermost core. Theatricalisation is seen to destabilise *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* in a way that its other keyings do not. The ideas and questions raised by McDonald’s concerns are developed in Chapter Three.

Goffman says that once an untransformed activity has been keyed it is vulnerable to rekeying, and that each subsequent rekeying “would seem to require less work” (Goffman 1975:159). In this way, Samudra’s keying of the multiply laminated *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* as the martial component of their dance theatre, and the company’s exploitation of the discipline’s exotic mimetic capital, might be seen to require little work. The emergence of a theatrical production like *The Sound of Silence* might be seen as a direct consequence of the CVN rekeying of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, which made the martial art into a performance. Zarrilli’s history of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* suggests that the discipline was developed to offer an emergent Kerala a model for masculinity. Its public performance of a heroic Malayāḷi masculinity helped to shape a regional identity. Using the ideas proposed by Polhemus, in “Dance, Gender and Culture,” CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* might be considered a strategic distillation of physical culture – “a schema, an abstraction or stylizing of physical culture” (Polhemus 1998:174). As well as shaping a region, CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* also contributed ideal masculine norms that the corporeal style of Malayāḷi men may approximate. Samudra’s martial dance theatre inflates the cultural performance and schema of gender and ethnicity contained in CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. In so doing, their martial dance theatre exploits the domestic and international appeal of heroic Malayāḷi masculinity. This overblown iteration of CVN *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*, however, might be seen to promote perceptions of it as pictographic dance and reveal its modelling of gender and ethnicity in such a way that its role as a utilitarian martial art is destabilised.

The Sound of Silence might also be seen to contribute to the commodification of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* that McDonald’s article defines as a detrimental diminishment of the discipline. Certainly Samudra’s martial dance theatre has carried *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* far from the *kaḷari* onto stages in countries such as the UK. The following chapter considers how this geographical and cultural dislocation contributes to the way in which contemporary martial

dance theatre productions, when presented in Western nations, become explicitly engaged with Eurocentric tropes concerning gender, ethnicity and race. Samudra's martial dance theatre could be seen to emasculate the idealized image of Malayāli manhood that Zarrilli speaks of, reshaping what Lee might determine a potentially radical racialised corporeal style to create a caricature to amuse Eurocentric tastes. To develop Lee's terms and further evoke their Freudian connotations, Samudra's martial dance theatre might be seen to make a 'totem' into a 'fetish'.

At this juncture in my comparable analysis of *Mika HAKA*, Mika's queering of gender and ethnic tropes became an important consideration. Torotoro might not be seen to have performed with the same critical distance that inflects his stage presence, and which Sieg considers crucial to self-minstrelsy's capacity to subvert. However, his persona and actions keyed their martial dance theatre in such a way that it did not necessarily affirm the tropes it evoked. Samudra's martial dance theatre contains no such keying. If it is seen to expose the performativity and theatricality of the martial arts, and the gendered and racial masculinities they sustain, then this is an incidental outcome. For the reasons discussed above, the conservative values of Kerala and the domestic cultural politics of India give little space for the kind of queer parody that Meyer describes, even when artists wish to engage in such a process – which Madhu and Sajeev do not.

Samudra's focus is more upon the 'Sanskritisation' of their art. The term Sanskritisation enters academic discourse concerning Indian dance through discussion of Devi's formulation of *bharatanāṭyam*. In her thesis, Coorlawala suggests that *bharatanāṭyam* rekeyed the lower caste dance traditions of the *devadāsī* in order to make them harmonious with "the customs and culture of upper castes," centred on *sattva* aesthetic and religious values (Coorlawala 1994:71). As such, the low caste dance form was Sanskritised.

Significantly, however, sociologist M. N. Srinivas originated the term Sanskritisation to

describe “a two-way process” in which lower castes and higher castes exchange cultural practices (Srinivas 1956:495).⁹ A person may be seen to gain respectability by learning ‘classical’ *bharatanāṭyam* because it is a cultural practice associated with the upper castes, but the central elements of this dance practice originated in lower caste communities.

Criticism of Devi’s *bharatanāṭyam* often falls upon her *Brahmin* appropriation of *dāsīattam*. Less criticism has fallen on comparable caste and regional politics in Chandralekha and Sheth’s adoption of *kaḷariṇṇayattu*. However, when Madhu and Sajeev left Sheth’s employment to form Samudra they saw themselves as taking charge of this choreographic rekeying of their Kerala’s martial art (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006). They describe their martial dance theatre as a Malayāḷi reclamation of this process. *Kaḷariṇṇayattu* is actually the hereditary preserve of the Nair caste, a *jāti* higher than those to which Madhu and Sajeev belong, so their ‘reclamation’ of *kaḷariṇṇayattu* is also part of their Sanskritisation of themselves.

After leaving Sheth, Madhu and Sajeev have striven to position their work as *mārgā*. By becoming choreographers of international performance, afforded platforms and support like that given to *bharatanāṭyam*, they gain not only financial security but also social standing. The exotic mimetic capital value of Samudra’s martial dance theatre emerges from their domestic mediation of tradition and modernity. Their focus, like that of Torotoro, is necessarily in the homeland, even though their career may carry them overseas.

Looking at *The Sound of Silence*, and the production’s disavowed erotic potential in particular, has advanced the thesis’ examination of how contemporary martial dance theatre arises at the junction of nativist and (neo)colonialist agendas. The genre’s staging of the martial arts creates new theatricalisations of idealised masculine identities that these disciplines sustain. These identities have a nativist totemic value in the performers’

⁹ Srinivas first published his usage of the term Sanskritisation in his 1952 book *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (Srinivas 1952).

homelands. This aspect is foremost during domestic performances of martial dance theatre. However, these idealised masculinities coalesced during the latter part of the colonial era. What is more, they are in continuing relationship with Eurocentric norms, which operate in the companies' homelands, and dominate in the Western nations to which they tour. It is this relationship, and the primitivist tropes that theatricalisations of martial artists may evoke, that are foremost during the companies' overseas performances of martial dance theatre.

The Western cultural strands that exist in the companies' homelands complicate this distinction between the domestic and foreign meanings of contemporary martial dance theatre. Samudra's martial dance theatre offers both cosmopolitan Indian audiences in New Delhi and British audiences in the UK a somewhat verboten exotic-erotic spectacle. In particular, Samudra's integration of classical Indian dance in their performance secures the company domestic and international stages ordinarily allocated to female dancers of *bharatanāṭyam*, and comparable classical forms. Yet, as Malayāli men trained in *kaḷarippayattu*, they enjoy social freedoms, a cultural status and a movement vocabulary that enables them to present, in their martial dance theatre, a bodily spectacle with a greater erotic potential than these women's 'traditional' performances are permitted to display.

Chapter Three: Martial Dance Theatre

This chapter expands the preceding chapters' analyses of *Mika Haka* and *The Sound of Silence* as paradigmatic examples of contemporary martial dance theatre. It focuses on how the genre creates, and is shaped by, intercultural audience-performer relationships. Torotoro and Samudra's performances of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* in the UK are examined to identify how these productions engage with Eurocentric ideas about gender, ethnicity and race. At the chapter's close, the ideas developed are used to analyse *Sutra*, and to refine the working definition of contemporary martial dance theatre stated here.

Contemporary martial dance theatre transposes martial arts actions out of their customary frames, into the explicitly aesthetic frame of Western dance theatre. The genre combines intimidation displays and pattern practices with dance vocabularies and other movement practices. The customary denotative value of these martial arts actions and their vestigial combative potential are somewhat elided. Their intrinsic choreographic and mimetic dimensions are emphasised. They are rekeyed as expressive movements, through which the male performers' create spectacular displays of their bodies. These men present as both martial artists and dancers, and engage their audience with an antagonistic-inviting address that creates a visceral rapport with an erotic potential.

This chapter considers how a cultural difference between contemporary martial dance theatre performers and their audiences – such as that encountered by Torotoro and Samudra in the UK – might be seen to contribute significantly to the genre's production of meaning(s). This difference might be understood as a pivotal component of the genre, and one that particularly contributes to its erotic potential. In such an intercultural context martial dance theatre performers directly encounter ambivalence about male dance, and the persistent

contradictory tropes of primitivism. Burt says the male dancer is a source of anxiety because he invariably exceeds the reticent movement vocabulary to which heteronormative values confine Western men. Yet, according to Dyer's analysis, such a man might avert his potential keying as a passive and feminised object by presenting himself as an active subject doing something. Torgovnick's analysis proposes that a man positioned as the non-Western Other may be viewed as part of a primitive feminine collective, and so keyed as the opposite to masculine individualised civilisation. Inversely, a wild native man may also be accorded the attributes of untamed violence and irrepressible sexuality, qualities suggestive of a hyper-masculinity.

The martial dance theatre performer's interception of these perspectives creates a muddling of Western gender norms. The aggression and utility of his martial arts movements may key him as a primal warrior who approximates Eurocentric heteronormative values. This potential, however, always stands in tension with the ways in which his aesthetic role and his native identity may counter this perception. The male performers of contemporary martial dance theatre appear to be simultaneously both (or neither) indigenous masculine martial artists executing antagonistic utilitarian actions, and international 'native' feminised dancers making an inviting show of pictographic gestures. Their bigeneric performance suggests both the heteronormative incidental spectacle of men engaged in action, and an ambisexual spectacle of men deliberately displaying themselves.

Contemporary martial dance theatre is inflected with a pervasive ambivalence that sustains this duality, and entertains audiences with it. The genre's performers might be seen to engage in 'flirtation' with and through the aggressive, sexual and primitivist connotations of their performance. Martial arts actions do not denote what an untransformed utilitarian combative action outside of such a frame could denote. In the Māori and Malayāli martial arts, combative actions may retain a potentially deadly practicality, but they are specially

keyed: they become moments in intimidation displays and pattern practice, activities that have aesthetic dimensions. When transferred to the frame of the stage, these activities are rekeyed once more. These codified activities with combative origins gain an additional lamination. They are reinterpreted as theatrical movements with a sensual appeal. This serial rekeying layers the martial dance theatre performers' actions with contradictory qualities, like a flirtation; they communicate rejection and aggression while also inviting a lingering gaze. What is more, contemporary martial dance theatre transposes martial arts valued as nativist totems into cultural contexts and theatrical frames tensioned with colonial histories. The performers attitudes to the racial typifications invoked by this conjunction are indeterminate. They may be seen to flirt with such caricatures, potentially parodying and subverting them, or lending them substance and re-entrenching them.

The flirtation with aggression, sex and ethnic and racial stereotypes that is present in contemporary martial dance theatre productions arises as a consequence of what David Gere, in his introduction to *Looking Out*, calls the “aesthetics of transfer” (Gere 1995:8). Gere uses this term to describe the presentation of non-Western performance as dance theatre on a proscenium stage in a Western context, and the new meanings engendered through this rekeying. He asks whether the Western appetite for such presentations (undiminished since his comments were published) is driven by a “respectable search for artistic revitalization” or a “desire for a new ‘exoticism’ (fresh stimulation for jaded palettes)” (Gere 1995:6). On the one hand, the transfer of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* to the UK might be seen to have diminished these productions. Removed from New Zealand and Kerala they lost many of the culturally specific meanings discussed in the two preceding chapters, and their elemental appeal – and eroticism – was perhaps increased. Conversely, if the exotic mimetic capital value of these performances was realised in the UK, might the aesthetics of transfer be seen to have enriched the company's martial dance theatre?

In the case of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, the first part of the transfer Gere describes – the placing of non-Western movement on a proscenium stage – occurred within Totoro and Samudra’s homelands. In staging their martial arts the companies followed precedents; the customary conventions of kapa haka, and the seminal innovation of Chandralekha and Sheth. Yet Totoro and Samudra departed from these models. In *Mika HAKA* the specificities of iwi tradition and the syncretic cultural balance of kapa haka are set aside. Haka is rekeyed as a spectacular expression of a contemporary adolescent male Māori identity. It becomes a dance, distinct from yet somehow akin to breaking. Samudra’s martial dance theatre is a development of Chandralekha’s pioneering use of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* to create contemporary Indian dance. In particular, *The Sound of Silence* adds a masculinist and nativist Malayāḷi lamination to the feminist and erotic inflections their work derives from their work with Sheth.

Martial dance theatre is the outcome of multiple rekeyings. The martial arts activities used in the genre are combat actions reshaped by successive interpretations, of the kind that Donohue identifies in the progression of *budo* from combat training to “a pursuit to ‘make you a better person’” (Donohue 1997:23). Contemporary martial dance theatre further rekeys these martial arts activities through the aesthetics of transfer; the addition of the frame of the stage, and the exoticisation of productions through their international presentation. Goffman proposes that an untransformed activity with a single keying displays a ‘shallow layering’ (Goffman 1975:156). In contrast, the ‘deep layering’ of a theatrical presentation he describes as making activities “unreal” (Goffman 1975:186). Martial dance theatre might be seen to create what Goffman calls an “upkeying” of the martial arts, which he defines as “an unauthorized increase in lamination of the frame” (Goffman 1975:186). Moreover, this upkeying might be seen to reveal the deep layering of the martial arts. This is ordinarily

concealed (or disavowed) in favour of a focus on their ‘reality’ – their potentially deadly practicality in particular.

The intimidation displays and pattern practices of the Māori and Malayāli martial arts are activities in which actions acquire special denotative values. They might be considered forms of threat, yet they may also be kinds of play or fantasy. Bateson notes, in “A Theory of Play an Fantasy,” that in all three keyings the concomitance of the appearance of an action and the performer’s intention is disrupted. He says:

Paradox is doubly present in the signals which are exchanged within the context of play, fantasy, threat, etc. Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional (Bateson 1972:182).

Martial dance theatre obscures the threat of the martial arts. Instead, the genre emphasises their potential as play and fantasy. The aesthetics of transfer theatricalises, exoticises, and eroticises intimidation displays and pattern practices in such a way that their frames are destabilised. Activities that might in their customary contexts seem to be definitive and contained martial arts become indefinite and permeable keyings of combat. They lose the kind of stable frame that Schechner says Bateson’s theorising conveys, and are seen to be ringed by a dynamic ‘net’ of the kind he proposes instead (Schechner 1993:41).

The aesthetics of transfer might specifically be seen to create a diminution or degradation of the totemic value of these martial arts. The preceding chapter’s discussion made reference to commentators whose perspectives might be seen to suggest that *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* elide the vital contextualisation that substantiates the Māori and Malayāli martial arts and dance forms. Papesch says the maintenance of clearly marked specific iwi identities is intrinsic to kapa haka (Papesch 2006:36-7). And Kāretu says that the actions and movements of haka are peripheral to the words (Kāretu 1993:83-4). But *Mika HAKA* – created to address an overseas audience – keys Torotoro (including its Pasifika members) as simply ‘Māori’, and their haka is performed expressly for the impact of their

movements. As such, the production might be seen to foster the kind of “Gee whiz!” response that Mead laments (Mead 1986:79). Similarly, McDonald raises concerns that performing *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* for the transitory and fleeting gaze of foreign audiences may render the martial art “ephemeral and emasculated” (McDonald 2007:160). And Valli describes contemporary Indian dance, in comparison to *bharatanāṭyam*, as a Western modern form sprinkled with “Indian ‘ingredients’” (Valli 2005:46). Such critiques might imply that *The Sound of Silence* presents a superficial version of Indian hereditary movement disciplines. It could be argued that contemporary martial dance theatre is contrived to satisfy the “desire for a new ‘exoticism’ (fresh stimulation for jaded palettes)” which Gere suggests might be driving the aesthetics of transfer (Gere 1995:6).

Torotoro and Samudra’s rekeying of wero, haka and *meippayaṭṭu* to increase their intercultural appeal might be seen to run counter to the post-colonial nativist agendas of Māori and Malayāḷi society. In the companies’ martial dance theatre these intimidation displays and pattern practices become keyed as play and fantasy. Their vestigial utilitarian value, their historical ritual functions and their contemporary intracultural totemic significance are obscured. This rekeying points to what Lee calls, in “Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic,” “the complexity of desires for the racialized body and the different implications of staging these desires” (Lee 2001:7). The companies’ martial dance theatre exploits a fetishistic potential that was always already present in their martial disciplines. Lee says: “It is precisely the fetishistic aspect of cultural nationalist performance that illuminates both its attracting powers and its attendant problems” (Lee 2001:7). The martial arts, as nativist idealisations of ethnically specific masculinities, have an intracultural fetishistic appeal that martial dance theatre adapts and exports to address an intercultural fetishistic appetite for primitive men. Goffman suggests that once an untransformed activity is keyed, further rekeyings can be achieved with less effort – with “one hand and a few bold strokes”

(Goffman 1975:159). In New Zealand and Kerala, wero, haka and *meippayāttu*, as practiced today, are interpretations of combative actions that contribute significantly to the lionising of historic figures – ancient Māori and Malayāli warriors. Through the aesthetics of transfer, Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre upkeys these disciplines to lionise a primitivist archetype instead – the Ancient Warrior

To succeed in their intercultural endeavour, the performers of contemporary martial dance theatre must address the bias and vagaries of their Western audience that Balme identifies in *Pacific Performances*. He notes that Western prejudices denigrate theatre: “it is often framed or, perjoratively spoken, marred by a sense of second-handedness” (Balme 2007:6). In addition Balme suggests that markets are governed by the “fickle laws of novelty” (Balme 2007:8). The commodity value of mimetic capital “diminishes through overuse and overexposure” (Balme 2007:9). Stephen Greenblatt, says Balme, describes “negotiating alterity” as “a reciprocal process where both sides or systems of representation strive to make sense of one another” (Balme 2007:7). Balme, however, notes that this exchange is not always one of equality. He says: “Although reciprocity is a two-way street it is seldom a balanced state of affairs, especially in the context of colonial history” (Balme 2007:2). Performances like *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* are vulnerable to the whims of the Western audiences whose appetites for the exotic they seek to exploit.

The pivotal factor that decides the fortune of a contemporary martial dance theatre production is its capacity to meet Western expectations about the non-Western culture it represents. A number of scholars have suggested that this kind of evaluation is a suspect process, even when the criteria in play seem informed. For example, in his introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* Werner Sollors asks “are not the formulas of ‘originality’ and ‘authenticity’ in ethnic discourse a palpable legacy of European romanticism?” (Sollors 1991:xiv). In *Between Theater and Anthropology* Richard Schechner says: “Modern

sensibility wants to bring into the postmodern world ‘authentic cultural items’. Maybe this is just a kind of postimperialist souvenir hunt” (Schechner 1985:114). Sollors and Schechner’s comments resonate with Torgovnick’s suggestion that primitivism shows how Other cultures may be recruited to serve as a ventriloquist’s dummy, through which the West seeks to iterate its own ideas (Torgovnick 1990:8).

When Torotoro and Samudra performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, through the operation of the aesthetics of transfer their martial dance theatre productions became rekeyed in two ways. The first is concrete: each production was presented in a space configured as a ‘black-box’ theatre, which has become the pervasive generic model for Western auditoria. The second matter is less tangible, and is best posed as a question. In Edinburgh how did the exotic productions of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* fit in the Western spectrum of lowbrow to highbrow performance? Looking at these productions’ Edinburgh performances demonstrates how they might be positioned in Western contexts as fun entertainment. However, other examples of contemporary martial dance theatre, such as *Sutra*, might be seen to share traits with highbrow, masculinist dance works. Moreover, the genre’s flirtation with aggression, sexuality and primitivist tropes also gives it a potential, which Mika utilises, to create statements of queer parody with an avant-garde appeal.

In New Zealand and Kerala, Torotoro and Samudra have often performed *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* in temporary theatre spaces, which made evident the connections between these productions and their homelands’ wider socio-cultural milieux. For example, in June 2003 Torotoro performed *Mika HAKA* in an Auckland Māori meetinghouse,¹ richly decorated with carvings, woven panels and paintings, and flanked on one side of its compound by an inner-city motorway. Comparably, in January 2009, Samudra performed *The*

¹ Ngā Wai o Horitiu Marae, Auckland.

Sound of Silence on the open ground between the major temple that serves Madhu and Sajeev's villages,² and the local bustling market.

Contrastingly, in Edinburgh, like the majority of Fringe Festival artists, Torotoro and Samudra performed in 'black-box' theatres. In her journal article "(IM)MATER(IALITY) and the Black-Box Theatre as an 'Empty Space' of Re-production," scenographic scholar Dorita Hannah traces the history of this kind of performance arena. She reports that American theatre planner George Izenour once defined the black-box theatre as an "uncommitted space" (Hannah 2003:28). Overtime, she notes, it has been seen as "a passive receptacle for the ever-changing parade of productions it nurtures" (Hannah 2003:32). This understanding accounts for its use in Edinburgh. The Fringe venues are temporary theatres set up in halls of various architectural styles, presenting varied works back-to-back all day long. The black tabs that surround the stage, and often the audience, are seen to create a neutral context, equally suited to the performances' diverse contents. Hannah suggests, however, that the black-box theatre is not a neutral frame, and it expresses a particular aesthetic:

One way of understanding the black-box and its absence of material form is through a collective desire in the modern theatre to embody a primordial space. [...] Investigating this claim opens up a gendered discourse surrounding the interior of the black-box. It becomes both womb-space and void-space (Hannah 2003:24).

Hannah proposes that the void of the black-box focuses audiences' attention on the metaphorical 'body' of the performance discipline, and most importantly, to this discussion of martial dance theatre, the very bodies of the performers. She says:

What is laid before us, upon a discursive slab, is the abject body of performance itself, loosened from the confines of a framed stage, slippery as mercury, spilling out matter in the forms of bodies and sounds, held in darkness and isolated in light (Hannah 2003:26).

Hannah's thoughts invite consideration of how the black-box theatres of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival may have enhanced the primitivist aesthetic and erotic potential of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. In his book *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural*

² Chirayinkeezhu Sarkara Temple, Thiruvananthapuram.

Politics Hal Foster discusses the rekeying of non-Western cultural artefacts through their exhibition in the frame of the Western gallery. Through this process, says Foster, “the primitive/tribal is set adrift from specific referents and coordinates – which then makes it possible to define it in wholly western terms” (Foster 1985:187). In their Māori and Malayāli homelands, Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre is keyed as contemporary and innovative, traditional and modern. In Edinburgh, however, their performances were detached from these cultural contexts. Instead, they were framed by Western imaginings of such remote places, in which fragments of fact and fantasy commingle. Torotoro and Samudra’s bodies were literally ‘held in darkness and isolated in light’ in the Fringe Festival’s black-box theatres. So too, their martial dance theatre was isolated from the wider physical cultures that Polehmus suggests, in “Dance, Gender and Culture,” dance distils, and which the martial arts might also be seen to crystallize (Polhemus 1998:175).

In Edinburgh, Torotoro and Samudra performed to audiences for whom the companies’ martial dance theatre affirmed or challenged their Western expectations about Māori and Malayāli men – expectations variously concordant or opposed to primitivist notions of the Other. The companies’ corporeal styles could be viewed as models of ethnic specific masculinities, perhaps restoring, sustaining, or overturning ‘tradition’. In New Zealand and Kerala, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* invited a similar complex of interpretations, but in Edinburgh Torotoro and Samudra stood alone as representatives of Māori and Malayāli men. They were without comparison, beyond the general archetypes of the Other which may have brought Western audiences to their performances. Indeed, Hannah’s article discusses how mystical yearnings in modern European theatre might be seen to have contributed to the creation of the primordial black box (Hannah 2003:27). When Māori and Malayāli men entered their Edinburgh theatres to embody the Ancient Warrior,

they might be seen to occupy a frame invented for just such moments of elemental and visceral spectacle.

Tribal artefacts in the galleries that Foster describes are framed for a curatorial gaze that might be seen to perpetuate a colonial regard. The presentation of non-Western performance in the black-box theatre might be seen to create a comparable keying. Imperial history was certainly implicated in Torotoro and Samudra's Edinburgh performances. These Māori and Malayāḷi companies danced their hereditary combat forms within the bounds of the nation state that formerly colonised their homelands. This conjunction might imply an act of native tribute to their former Imperial rulers. Yet, counter to such analysis, Torotoro and Samudra's Edinburgh black-boxes might also be considered prestigious frames, which invested the combative techniques preserved in their martial arts with international cultural status, and significant mimetic capital value. Perhaps Torotoro and Samudra entered Edinburgh more in triumph than tribute. How might the positioning of their martial dance theatre in the West as lowbrow or highbrow performance contribute to this balance?

In *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-cultural Transactions in Australasia*, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo quote Brian Singleton's discussion of two distinct types of Orientalism in his book *Oscar Asche, Orientalism, and British Musical Comedy*. Singleton describes, they say:

a pictorialist variety, suited to popular entertainment, that "subjected the Orient to fantasy in exotic spectacles", and in a modernist variety (as espoused by Yeats, Craig and Artaud) interested in "high-ideal aesthetics or tribal primitivism" (Gilbert and Lo 2007:29).

Singelton's analysis resonates with a comparable duality that Nirad. C. Chaudhuri observes. He says India, co-opted as the Eurocentric Other, has been alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, keyed as hyper-sexualised or transcendent of corporeality. In his book *Erotica in Indian Dance*, Projesh Banerji quotes Chaudhuri's *The Continent of Circe: Being an Essay on the Peoples of India*. Chaudhuri speaks of "Vedantizing Occidentals and Kamasutrizing Occidentals":

the exhausted spirituality of the West is prompting some misled and partly foolish Westerners to come to India in order to renovate it from Hindu springs, in the same way the exhausted vitality is turning to India in a hope that it will be rejuvenated by Hindu sexual life. (Banerji 1983:97).

Singleton and Chaudhuri's comments seem to describe the ventriloquism of primitivist discourse that Torgovnick analyses, in which the Eurocentric Other is incessantly rekeyed to fulfil its role as the Western observers opposite (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Contemporary martial dance theatre productions might be seen to negotiate with the particular dualities Singleton and Chaudhuri observe. Their value as exotic mimetic capital may rest in a capacity to sustain the possibility of being viewed as either lowbrow, pictorialist, sexualised fantasy or 'high-ideal aesthetic' expressions of spirituality. *Mika HAKA* might be seen to fit most readily into the first of these categories, but the show's inclusion of a *capella* chants and moments evoking Māori mythology might also make it – at times – seem part of the latter bracket. Samudra's martial dance theatre sits equally astraddle the two categories. The closeting of sexuality in *The Sound of Silence* (discussed in Chapter Two) may help position the production in the latter highbrow bracket, but sections of the production are comparable to popularist forms of Western entertainment.

One such section of *The Sound of Silence* Samudra call "Body Contact Movements" (hereafter referred to as "Body").³ This duet is danced to the sound of a male voice reciting rhythmic syllables. Madhu and Sajeev, dressed in *lengotti*, execute counterbalanced movements and lifts. Some are presented as complicit partner dance while others look more like a fight. For example, like a danseur with his ballerina, Sajeev twirls on the spot cradling Madhu in his arms. In a contrasting moment, Sajeev leaps at Madhu, knocks him to the floor, and then freezes with one arm raised as if to strike him with a blow.

³ "Body" was not part of Samudra's performances in Edinburgh in 2006 but was performed during Samudra's UK tour in 2005. Samudra, *The Sound of Silence* (Leicester, Birmingham, London, Salford, Bristol, Much Wenlock, Pershore: 27 August -11 September 2005).

“Body” is comparable to a number of male duets or double acts currently prominent in Western popular performance, which present their audiences with examples of men moving together in intimate ways. Differing overlapping audience interpretations might understand the intimacy of these duets to be incidental to the men’s utilitarian engagement with one another, a closeted or forthright display of homosexual desire, or something less defined – all or neither of these things. “Body” and these comparable duets are spectacles in which confusions Sedgwick notes in *Between Men* are on display; how similarities connect “the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding, and the most reprobate expressions of male homosexual sociality” – how being a man’s man is contiguous with being ‘interested in men’ (Sedgwick 1985:89). These duets may also be expressions of a ‘homosocial desire’ that Sedgwick hypothesised, and evidence, perhaps, that the continuum between the homosocial and homosexual may not as radically disrupted, or policed, in Western society today, as they were at the time she wrote *Between Men* (Sedgwick 1985:1-2).

In “Body,” Madhu and Sajeev use acrobalance moves familiar to audiences of contemporary Western circus. In such gymnastic partner work a ‘base’ partner lifts and throws a ‘flyer’ partner. “Body” might be compared with the performance of such a male acrobalance duo called Golden Power – Hungarians Sandor Vlah and Gyula Takacs. My discussion of their work is based on viewing digital footage, given to me, of their performance at 6th International Circus Festival of Budapest in 2006 (Murray 2008). Painted gold from head to toe, these thickset strong men wrap their arms and legs about one another to execute slow sustained vertical lifts and horizontal counter balances. The duo travel internationally, and in 2010 *The Hindu* carried Meera Srinivasan and Hugo Williams review of their performance in Chennai: “The strength and beauty of their act was remarkable, resembling a slow-motion ballet rather than simply a strongman competition. [The two men] stunned the spectators with their ease and grace” (Srinivasan and Williams 2010). “Body” is

faster and more rhythmically dynamic than the sculptural performance of Golden Power. Madhu and Sajeev's petite physiques mean they must use more jumps and tumbles in their acrobalance. But both duos perform athletic movements that make a spectacular exhibition of their bodies – fully displayed by each pair's minimal costuming.

Golden Power's act might be viewed as a series of gymnastic feats. Recalling Goffman's analysis of bodily performance, the duet it is not a display with the utilitarian qualities of boxing, but though controlled and graceful (and perhaps therefore 'balletic') neither is it quite as pictographic as dance per se. The effort and labour of "Body," like Golden Power's act, may also key Madhu and Sajeev's duet as 'activity,' of a kind which – according to Dyer – may assert the men's (Eurocentric) heteronormative masculinity, even though they are on display. Comparison of "Body" and Golden Power's act also brings attention to the ways in which each pair of men are costumed and choreographed to accentuate their similarities to one another. Like Vlah and Takacs, Madhu and Sajeev present as a team of two working together. The removal of difference between the men creates a doubling effect. It suggests they are one another's mirror image. Or perhaps, like soldiers, two identical figures of potentially many. This doubling may contain the potential eroticism of their homosociality, rekeying 'like relating to like' as 'clone with clone' – a sameness devoid of tension.

However, the doubling illusion of "Body" and Golden Power is realised literally in the performances of a Polish duo called the Caesar Twins, and eroticised. I saw the monozygotic brothers, Pierre and Pablo Caesar, perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006.⁴ Their show included an acrobalance duet performed, in swimming trunks, on the lip and in the bowl of a Perspex tank of water. Where Golden Power are clinically instrumental, the Caesar

⁴ Caesar Twins, *Caesar Twins* (Edinburgh Fringe Festival: Assembly Rooms, 28 July to 28 August 2006).

Twins are sensual. Stephen Armstrong discussed their act in his London *Times* article

“Cabaret Muscles in on the Act:”

The Caesar Twins poster implies a circus show of some kind: handstands, cartwheels, spectacular jumps. But when the curtain goes up, we might be in Berlin at the decline of the Weimar Republic. This is cabaret with muscles, curves and sinuous, writhing youths; it's cabaret going back to its dark, erotic roots (Armstrong 2006).

Pierre and Pablo's stage banter sexualises their relationship with the audience. Reviewing their 2008 Edinburgh Fringe show for *The British Theatre Review* Jackie Fletcher asks:

ever wondered what it would be like to tumble into bed with a pair of drop-dead gorgeous identical twins! With their perfect athlete's bodies and charming smiles, Pierre and Pablo Caesar would suit nicely, and, in fact, it's a joke they refer to in their show with a member of the audience (Fletcher 2008).

Madhu and Sajeev do not speak on stage, let alone make such comments, but, like the Caesar Twins, the intimacy of their body contact has an erotic potential. For example, twice in “Body” they perform lifts in which Madhu's face and Sajeev's groin come into contact. What is more, in the duet's slower moments the men gaze into one another's eyes, and slide their hands slowly along one another's limbs. While such movements contain an erotic charge, Madhu and Sajeev's physical likeness (costume aside) may suggest a familial bond. Like the twins' act, “Body” might be seen to present men whose intimacy is not necessarily a precursor to, or sublimation, of what Sedgwick calls “homosexual genitality” (Sedgwick 1985:89).

The homoerotic potential of acrobatic male dance is made explicit in *Zumanity*. This ‘adult’ show, presented by The Sensual Side of Cirque du Soleil, continues its run at New York-New York Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, where it premiered in 2003. *Zumanity* features a male duet that combines tango, acrobalance and stage fighting. It is called “2 Men” and was created by, and for, Patrick King (who is African American) and Johan King Silverhult (who is white). This gay husband-and-husband team no longer perform in *Zumanity*. In his 2009 *Entertainment Today* review of the show, Travis Michael Holder described the men he saw perform the duet:

Troy Holt and Brandon Pereyda, one very white and one very black, perform a fiercely mesmerizing tango choreographed to show the conflicted nature of their mano-y-mano relationship. Alternating between violent revulsion and several passionate sexual tableaux, their breathtakingly beautiful dance is finalized by a torrid kiss (Holder 2009).

My analysis of “2 Men” is developed from viewing footage of Bernard Gaddis and Kevin Gibbs’ performance of the duet at the 2006 GLAAD Media Awards.⁵

The relationship in “2 Men” is similar to that played out in the fight-dance of “Body.” Gaddis and Gibbs caress and embrace, support and lift one another, then shove apart and lash out. However, whereas Madhu and Sajeev’s interactions are an ebb and flow of antagonism and complicity, Gaddis and Gibbs’ explosive exchange alternates between violent rejection and passionate attraction. The sexual tension of their duet leads to a climactic conclusion quite different to the end of “Body.” At the end of “Body” Madhu stalks slowly towards Sajeev, who is reclining on the floor, and heaves him into the air. Sajeev is flung over Madhu’s shoulder. He hangs there, his body limp, while Madhu carries him slowly offstage. This conclusion is ambiguous. It seems to suggest Madhu’s defeat of Sajeev, or the latter’s capitulation, or perhaps the men’s playful compliance in a movement sequence without narrative logic. The end of “2 Men” has no such ambiguity. Gibbs draws Gaddis to him and kisses him on the mouth: having fought it seems apparent they will make love.

“2 Men” makes explicit a homoerotic potential latent in ‘play’ fighting – a potential with which “Body,” and contemporary martial dance theatre as a whole, both plays and fights. In his participant-observer ethnography *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* Loïs Wacquant says boxers knowingly use slang terms that sexualise fighting: when they speak of “the irrepressible desire to ‘get it on’ in the ring” says Wacquant, “the erotic connotation of the folk expression is not innocent” (Wacquant 2004:70). In her monograph, *On Boxing*, Joyce Carol Oates considers how a boxer’s training discipline also sexualises his fighting:

The heralded celibacy of the fighter-in-training is very much a part of boxing lore: instead of focusing his energies and fantasies upon a woman the boxer focuses upon an opponent. Where

⁵ Bernard Gaddis and Kevin Gibbs, “2 Men” (Hollywood: Kodak Theatre, April 8, 2006).

Woman has been, Opponent must be. As Ali's Bundini Brown has said: "You got to get the hard-on, and then you got to keep it. You want to be careful not to lose the hard-on, and cautious not to come" (Oates 1987:30).

In her book *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The "I" of the Tiger* Kath Woodward comments on such discourse about boxing. She says: "the understanding that fighters are redirecting sexual energy in combat does seem to compound the troubled alliance between aggression and sexuality; sex and combat can become interchangeable"(Woodward 2007:134). Oates develops such an idea:

No sport appears more powerfully homoerotic: the confrontation in the ring – the disrobing – the sweaty heated combat that is part dance, courtship, coupling – the frequent urgent pursuit by one boxer of the other in the fight's natural and violent movement toward the "knockout": surely boxing derives much of its appeal from this mimicry of a species of erotic love in which one man overcomes the other in an exhibition of superior strength and will (Oates 1987:30).

Boxing is a piquant example of the complexities of the homosocial that Sedgwick names. To borrow Solomon-Godeau's words (from her discussion of ephebic and heroic male figures in art) the homosocial world is "shaped by the expulsion of femininity, the privileging of male fraternal bonds" (Solomon-Godeau 1997:139). What Oates sees may be an interpretation remote from the boxers' experiences, but the absence of women from their world, their intense focus on one another, and their intimate corporeal engagement combine to invite such propositions or suppositions. Moments of martial dance theatre like "Body" invite comparable questions about what is denoted by homosocial physical intimacy, and play fighting in particular.

"Body" muddles frames, and this creates a confusion about what keying pertains to their actions, and to the men's identities. Madhu and Sajeev's aggressive combative actions in "Body" could be considered part of a conventionally masculine corporeal style. But the surety of this is compromised by the collaboration that creates their 'fight'. For example, when Madhu flings a defeated Sajeev over his shoulder, it is Sajeev's powerful leap not Madhu's heave that makes this action possible. The conflict presented in "Body" is evidently complicit: their aggression is a display. The rim of their activity always keys the men's

actions as theatre. This destabilises the capacity of their combat to be a show of utilitarian activity of the kind that might – Dyer suggests – affirm a Eurocentric heteronormative masculinity (Dyer 1992:269-70). A similar complication pertains to Madhu and Sajeev’s acrobalance. It requires exceptional ergonomic technique. It too might be thought of as a utilitarian activity that might substantiate their masculinity. But Madhu and Sajeev play both ‘base’ and ‘flyer’: they switch between roles historically distinguished as male and female in circus and ballet. (Though today contrary examples abound, in the popular imagination these archetypes persist). Moreover, when either Madhu or Sajeev is lifted they may appear to become passive men on display. In these instants, their potential feminisation through being on exhibition is unchecked by the activity that Dyer suggests may counter such a keying.

Madhu and Sajeev’s lingering touches express an intimacy that borders on desire, but “Body” has no moment like the ‘torrid kiss’ of “2 Men.” “Body” remains adrift in the incertitude of the homosocial-homosexual continuum that is central to the complexity and appeal of martial dance theatre performances like *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. The productions focus on the ambiguous spectacle of ‘like’ men moving together. The ‘difference’ that tensions contemporary martial dance theatre, as exemplified by Torotoro and Samudra’s UK performances, is the difference of ethnicity – or race – that distinguishes the ‘native’ men on stage from their predominantly white, Western audiences. In *Gone Primitive*, Torgovnick describes the primitivist tropes that she explores as “images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions” (Torgovnick 1990:8). In the UK, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* intercepted Eurocentric primitivist ideas of this kind. Often checked but not forgotten, these ideas assign gender attributes and sexual proclivities according to ethnicity and race.

“Body,” like “2 Men,” uses the juxtaposition of antagonistic and inviting movement to shape the relationship presented onstage. In the majority of *The Sound of Silence* and *Mika*

HAKA, however, the performers use this contradictory combination not to address one another, but to address the audience. The ‘fight-dance’ tension seen in “Body” and “2 Men” is opened out to become an ambiguous audience-performer exchange: the to and fro, of combat-cum-seduction, courses not between the performers onstage, but between the performers and their audience. Furthermore, the onstage interracial tension seen in “2 Men” becomes a performer-audience tension in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*.

At a certain level “2 Men” is ‘like’ dancing with ‘like’: Gaddis and Gibbs are the same sex, similar build, and share a common movement vocabulary. Moreover, each leads and each follows, each strikes and caresses the other. Their distinct skin difference, however, keys their duet as a performance of the relationship between a white man (Gibbs) and a black man (Gaddis). Frantz Fanon, in his seminal book *Black Skin, White Masks*, states that racist tropes, in global circulation, have enshrined the black man as “the incarnation of a genital potency” (Fanon 1967:177). This might imply that Gibb’s masculinity is overshadowed by Gaddis’ greater virility – that Gibbs is femininised beside Gaddis. However, differing concatenations of essentialist ideas might alternatively position Gaddis’ as the feminised partner. In her essay in *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth* Charlene Regester notes how the veneration of black athletes has created a “monolithic and one-dimensional black masculinity” intimately equated with physicality (Regester 2005:338). In *Gone Primitive* Torgovnick notes: “Within Western culture, the idiom ‘going primitive’ is in fact congruent in many ways to the idiom ‘getting physical’” (Torgovnick 1990:228). In *Primitive Passions* she observes that the primitive is “coded metaphorically as feminine” (Torgovnick 1997:14). It might be argued, therefore, that while tropes that associate the black man with corporeality may suggest his virile hypermasculinity, they may also imply his immersion in the physical and the primitive, and consequently his femininity. In her essay in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* Robyn Wiegman says the black man occupies

an oscillating social position in Western society; his hypermasculinisation as the incarnation of a genital potency stands in direct contradiction to his feminisation as a buffoonish Uncle Tom (Wiegman 1993:180). Imperial supremacism might be brought into this discussion. In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, Robert Young explores Arthur Gobineau's theorising of race in *The Inequality of Human Races*. Young says Gobineau's discussion of interracial sexuality describes "the active Aryan's as the 'pre-eminently male groups' and the desirable yellow and black races as the 'female or feminized races'" (Young 1995:109). Gobineau's thesis implies, says Young, that the fundamental white-black relation is one of "male to female" (Young 1995:109).

Gaddis and Gibbs' performance in "2 Men" disturbs Eurocentric gender norms on a number of levels: the men swap roles that are ordinarily gendered male and female, leading and following, lifting and being lifted; they fight, creating a heteronormative display of 'masculinity-as-activity,' but their caresses and final kiss marks them as homosexual; and the men's skin difference evokes contradictory tropes that ascribe them gender and sexuality on the basis of their race. Torotoro and Samudra's UK performances were similarly complicated by the skin difference that distinguished these Māori and Malayāli dancers from their predominantly white audiences. The companies' performances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival were inflected with the historical and contemporary tensions implicit in this meeting, and tropes that confuse differences of ethnicity and race with differences of gender and sexuality. *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* present Torotoro and Samudra as Other to their Western audiences – martial natives from afar – whom the contradictory values of primitivism may key as either hypermasculine or feminised, or both. However, Torotoro and Samudra's particular ethnicities and movement qualities might be seen to attribute gender (and sexuality) differently to each company. Overall, Torotoro's masculinity is reinforced, whereas Samudra's is not.

Mika HAKA opens and closes with Torotoro's men dancing high-speed Pacific Island choreography. Their quickstepping and grins key them as Polynesian youths playing at Broadway. They are, perhaps, feminised 'Uncle Toms' or 'Brown Māori' figures of the kind that Belich examines in his "Race and New Zealand" (Belich 1994:20). But in their recurrent haka and wero actions, Torotoro display aggression and passion more akin to the 'Black Savage' that Belich describes (Belich 1994:14). In the UK, haka is synonymous with the All Blacks. Its prominence in *Mika HAKA* means that Torotoro's performance might be seen to most closely realise, for British audiences, figures whom Belich characterises as 'Red Māori': "*natural* warriors, racially inclined towards war and such substitutes as rugby union" (Belich 1994:18 [italics in original]).

Torotoro's choreography in songs like "Ko Te Iwi" integrates the thrusting of haka and the b-boy's swagger. Their martial dance theatre has the "strength, directness, and weight" that, says Hanna, Eurocentric perspectives identify as masculine attributes (Hanna 1988:217). In *The Sound of Silence* Samudra's leaps, kicks, and lunges inflect their performance with such qualities too. But whereas Torotoro's punching rhythms make their dance staccato and jagged, in comparison Samudra's movements are fluid and rounded. In *Chandralekha* Bharucha notes that the actions of *meippayāttu* meld seamlessly (Bharucha 1995:151). In Chandralekha's productions these qualities became part of her exploration of femininity, which he says, she equated with pliancy and circularity (Bharucha 1995:253). In *The Sound of Silence* the capacity of such movements to appear feminine may align Samudra's dance with a Eurocentric mythologising of Indian men.

Colonial history has evolved ideas of Indian men as feminised. These concepts Revathi Krishnaswamy examines in her essay "The Economy of Colonial Desire." She says: "I shall use the term *effeminism* to refer to the racialized construction of 'femininity-in-masculinity'" (Krishnaswamy 2002:259 [italics in original]). Krishnaswamy proposes that

during the British rule of India the Hindu faith became positioned as the female Other of Judeo-Christian monotheism: “its erotic, ecstatic cults seemed improper, irrational, and feminine” (Krishnaswamy 2002:300). Her essay details how contradictory notions – like those that Torgovnick finds central to primitivist discourse – created an ambiguous imperial stereotype of the Indian man, as both a feminine Hindu and a primal savage. She says: “Homosexual yet manly, heterosexual yet effeminate, Indian masculinity injects a fearful indeterminacy into the economy of colonial desire” (Krishnaswamy 2002:302). In *The Sound of Silence* Madhu and Sajeev’s integration of feminine *bharatanāṭyam* and masculine *kalarippayattu*, and their duets implying a homosocial desire, might be seen to evoke the tropes Krishnaswamy describes. But whereas the indeterminate Indian masculinity might have alarmed colonialists, when Samudra present as such figures they may thrill modern Western audiences with the frisson of the strange – the queer licensed as the exotic.

To this point, this chapter’s analysis suggests that Torotoro and Samudra’s performances of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* in the UK, rekeyed by the aesthetics of transfer, became part of a homoerotic and popularist stream of entertainment. The Edinburgh venues of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* do not compare to the prestigious stages accorded to ballet, or ‘serious’ contemporary dance. However, the company’s dancing of martial prowess might be compared to performances seen in some highbrow Western productions. This suggests that though contemporary martial dance theatre may be enjoyed as commercial entertainment, this is not its only potential.

Parallels can be found between the ballet *Spartacus* and *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. The Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian created the score of *Spartacus* in the late 1950s. The ballet’s eponymous Greek hero leads his people in revolt against Crassus, the Roman counsel who has enslaved them. A number of choreographic settings of *Spartacus* exist in the repertoires of major ballet companies around the world. In 1968, Yuri Grigorovich

choreographed *Spartacus* for The Bolshoi Ballet of St Petersburg. His showcase for the bravura talents of the Bolshoi's male dancers established the ballet as a signature work of the company. In the same year, the Hungarian State Ballet premiered László Seregi's *Spartacus*. In 1978 The Australian Ballet first performed Seregi's choreography. My discussion of *Spartacus* begins with observations made after watching a film of the company's production of the ballet, first released on VHS in 2000 (Dresdon 2000).

In Act One, Crassus forces Spartacus (danced by Steven Heathcote) to fight to the death with a compatriot (Martyn Fleming). Heathcote and Fleming's duet merges stage fighting with more familiar ballet vocabulary. Their thrusting shoves become the impetus for assisted lifts and counter-weighted spins. Descents and exits from these moments of contact are turned into grapples and tumbles. In the final moments of the duet Heathcote thrusts his stage dagger into Fleming's gut, who slumps in his arms as if dead. Like "Body," and "2 Men," the duel ends in a hostile embrace. There is an ambiguous intimacy, like the boxers' clinch, which Oates eroticises, as does – says Wacquant – the men's own discourse.

Act One of *Spartacus* also presents the hero and his male compatriots in martial training. In Seregi's version of this scene, as staged by The Australian Ballet, Heathcote and the male corps de ballet dance in ways comparable to Torotoro's "Tangatanga."⁶ In this part of *Mika* HAKA, four of Torotoro's men, holding wooden staffs diagonally across their bodies, move across the stage, from side to side, in a grid formation. Their eyes fix the audience. They flick up their heels as if kicking dust, and dropping to a low crouch they creep stealthily. These are wero actions: Torotoro appear to perform a wero en masse. But their martial actions are exaggerated and adapted: they are platforms from which the men can launch into energetic dance. "Tangatanga" climaxes with a motif from Niuean dance: the men leap from foot to foot, twirling their weapons like a drum major's baton. In *Spartacus*,

⁶ Tangatanga is a te reo neologism created by Ngāpo Wehi for Mika's usage. The suffix '-tanga' is attached to the word tangata (people) to suggest a 'peopling-force'. The word was coined as a substitute for ure (penis).

Heathcote and his fellow dancers' drill progresses to a similar climax: the men clutch their staffs and rock from foot to foot, building momentum until they are jumping *en cloche* (legs swinging like a bell).

The martial theme of *Spartacus* might be seen as a closeting device, like those that Foster identifies in "Closets Full of Dances." The men's performance of combative actions helps assuage the anxieties that male dancers – particularly of ballet – may create for European audiences, and creates circumstances of male physical intimacy with a disavowed homoerotic potential. In *The Male Dancer* Burt suggests:

The theme of male violence has been used as a guise for presenting a spectacle of the male dancer's body because displays of fighting movement clearly use dancerly qualities which are appropriately masculine and thus unproblematic for the male dancer (Burt 2006:48).

The martial narrative of *Spartacus* might be seen to key the male homosociality of both the characters and the dancers as born of the necessity of battle. The homoerotic potential of their fictive and actual cohorts is checked. What is more, the theme of combat counters the passivity of the male dancers' role as men on display. They present as men training for and engaging in combat. Their activity affirms their masculinity.

These strategies can be seen at play in the 1979 film of the Bolshoi's staging of Grigorovich's *Spartacus* in which Māris Liepa dances the role of Crassus (Grigorovich and Derbenyov 2003). During Liepa's major solo, in Act Three, he wields a short sword. His movements, however, have little in common with martial arts pattern practices or military drill. Liepa does not rehearse attacks and parries. Instead, he stabs his weapon into the space above or before him as he leaps or lunges. His sword extends the line of his expansive attitudes and accentuates the punching dynamic of his movements. Liepa's weapon contributes to the aesthetic of his solo – the shapes and rhythms of his dance. It also has a number of symbolic values. It signifies that his character is a general, but it is also an emblem of Crassus' and, by association, Liepa's masculinity. The sword keys Liepa's bravura yet ornamental leaps and spins as activity. His stabs imply that though his performance is

pictographic his movements have substance and force, and the potentially subversive display of his male body is keyed to appear in keeping with heteronormative values.

Contemporary martial dance theatre may be seen to deploy similar strategies to those seen at play in Lieppa's solo. Torotoro and Samudra's swipes, punches, and kicks make statements of archetypal masculinity which oppose the persistent Western anxieties about male dance that Burt names in *The Male Dancer* and which Fisher and Shay's *When Men Dance* re-examines. Furthermore, the men's difference from their predominantly white audiences may evoke essentialist ideas that invest their demonstration of martial intent, in contrast to those of the male dancers of *Spartacus*, with a kind of 'authenticity'.

Lieppa's balletic corporeal style compromises his portrayal of a warrior. His movements are vigorous and full of force, but his technique places all emphasis on display. Lieppa does not commit his weight to his weapon, as a swordsman must do. All his athletic efforts are focussed on achieving climactic moments of aerial suspension. Lieppa is a *premier danseur noble* not a martial artist, yet Torotoro and Samudra are also principally dancers and not combatants. Their training in wero and haka and *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* may make their martial actions in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* more plausible than Lieppa's. But, more importantly, Eurocentric prejudices lend these Māori and Malayāḷi men's presentation as warriors a credibility which Lieppa – a white man – cannot not command.

The primitivist tropes that martial dance theatre evokes key the genre's male performers as 'natives'. The productions exploit a suggestion that while white dancers like Lieppa, Heathcote and Fleming live in a civilisation remote from combat, non-white Other men, like Torotoro and Samudra, are from cultures where the warrior's life goes on. Discussion of Carlos Acosta's *Spartacus*, which he danced with the Bolshoi in 2008, suggests that his ethnicity gave his performance a verisimilitude that previous performances of the role lacked. In interviews to camera, that accompany Ross MacGibbon's film of the production,

Acosta, his fellow principle dancers and the Bolshoi's creative executives all concur that Acosta was 'born' for the role of Spartacus (MacGibbon 2008). Patricia Boccadoro ventures the same opinion in her review of the Paris production:

Acosta, born to dance this role, was absolutely astounding in the first act, his act. He not only had the strength but the rage of a trapped animal. There was a wild, primitive quality to his dancing from the moment he arrived on stage with his long, black, matted locks and unkempt, unshaven face (Boccadoro 2008).

Acosta's African ancestry might be seen to validate his expression of a slave in revolt. But Boccadoro's words suggest that rather than the specificities of nationality and ethnicity, it is the particular primitivism of racial archetypes about the black man that distinguishes Acosta's rendition of Spartacus. Whereas a white dancer might 'perform' primal masculinity, primitivist discourse implies that an Other like Acosta 'is' a primal man.

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman considers how some correspondence between a performer and his role is often assumed. He says we, the audience, anticipate "that some of what we will see as part-appropriate behaviour in the stage actor's part is 'natural' to him, that is, part of his offstage behaviour" (Goffman 1975:284). In the case of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, however, the productions evocation of primitivist tropes suggests a total concomitance of the dancers and their roles. Torotoro and Samudra's contemporary martial dance theatre creates an example of what Hanna calls, in her book *Dance, Sex, and Gender*, actualisation: "An *actualization* is a portrayal by the dancer of roles that blur the boundary between 'real' and 'theatrical' life" (Hanna 1988:15).

Presenting a warrior's active, martial prowess may reinforce the masculinity of a male dancer. This keying, however, stands in perpetual tension with the potential feminisation he invites by making a bodily display. Similarly, Eurocentric perspectives may suggest that a non-white man's demonstration of marital prowess is genuine in a way that a white man's is not. Yet, the contradictory and contiguous tropes of primitivist discourse mean that his native, aggressive virility is ever jeopardised by his keying as the feminine Other outside the white

man's heterosexual hegemony. As such, though martial dance theatre may promise an especially masculinist performance, it is constantly shadowed by the possibility of being a genre in which the male performers are doubly feminised – as men on display and as Other.

The position of contemporary martial dance theatre in the lowbrow to highbrow spectrum of Western performance is comparably ambivalent. The genre might be seen to share traits with both popularist sexualised performances and serious works with classical themes. *Mika HAKA* is most closely allied to the first bracket: the dancers' breaking to recorded music, their occasional clowning and Mika's suggestive patter gives the show an easy appeal. Contrastingly the abstract aesthetic, acoustic music and spiritual ambience of *The Sound of Silence* might suggest a more recognisably classical aesthetic. Moreover, Mika's presence in *Mika HAKA* emphasises the queer sexual appeal of the production, which keys Torotoro as South Seas native men and deliberately engages with Western fantasies about the erotic-exotic. *The Sound of Silence*, however, makes no declaration of such fetishistic value in Madhu and Sajeev's bodily display. The production's sexual potential is closeted away, and Samudra indicate little or no awareness of their erotic presence.

Perhaps comparable differences distinguish the contemporary gay aesthetic of a performance like "2 Men" from the Greco-Roman classicism of the slave duel in *Spartacus*. All the production details of *Zumanity* are aligned to titillate the audience: Gaddis and Gibbs' briefs are cut to ensure their physiques are best displayed, and their every touch is organised to invest maximum tension in their final kiss. The bodily display created by Acosta's performance in *Spartacus* may equally titillate, but this is not his or the production's declared intention. He dances a classical hero – whose macho heterosexuality is encapsulated in the moment when he lifts Nina Kaptsova (his onstage 'wife') high in the air with a single arm.

Combat provides a movement vocabulary and a model of male interactions that can be used to create dance that promotes or suppresses different dimensions of the homosocial-

homosexual continuum that Sedgwick explores in *Between Men*. Martial dance theatre may be used to bolster sanctioned homosocial intimacy of the kind that is intrinsic to patriarchal hegemony, or to publicise what Sedgwick calls “reprobate expressions of male homosexual sociality” (Sedgwick 1985:89). The genre’s ambiguities, however, suggest the continuum that Sedgwick hypothesises, rather than entrenching these polarities (Sedgwick 1985:1). Sedgwick suggests the homosocial continuum she explores is charged with desire, love and sex, and hostility and hatred (Sedgwick 1985:2). In “Body” the two men’s relationship touches on each, and holds to none. Torotoro’s camaraderie while they perform their haka, and the men’s direct address to the audience – which includes other men – is a commingling of aggressive fury and ecstatic delight. Contemporary martial dance theatre’s confusing of antagonistic combat and complicit dance implies that the “affective or social force, the glue” that creates the homosocial continuum is men’s desire for physical intimacy with other men (Sedgwick 1985:2).

Martial dance theatre keys its performers as contradictory figures whose ambiguity exceeds issues of gender and sexuality. On the one hand, Torotoro and Samudra are keyed as native practitioners of their customary martial arts. The combination of the men’s combative movement vocabularies, confrontational demeanours, and elements of traditional costume, implies that they belong to the martial arenas of the marae and *kałari*. Yet, at the same time, the intimidation displays and pattern practices that they present are evidently highly choreographed; every detail has been adjusted to synchronise their movements with the music, and to entertain the audience’s gaze. *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* invests Torotoro and Samudra with double identities, presenting them simultaneously as Māori and Malayālī martial artists and as international dance theatre performers.

The martial artist appears focused on the utilitarian value of his movements, while the dancer works to achieve grace in his movements rather than accomplish a tangible task. The

preceding chapters have complicated this distinction, but in the Western popular imagination it largely holds sway. The martial artist's actions seem to belong to what Goffman calls "untransformed reality" (Goffman 1975:156). The dancer's movements, in contrast, are "removed from any particular replication of day-to-day activity"; they are part of a world referent unto itself (Goffman 1975:57). Goffman explores this tension when comparing the boxer and the dancer: the boxer, he says, is concerned with "a state to be accomplished in whatever way seems most effective," while the dancer focuses on "bodily mimed feeling and bodily symbolized fate" (Goffman 1975:568).

As martial dance theatre performers, Torotoro and Samudra's identities are a concatenation of two roles: martial artist and the dancer. But their occupation of the stage frame identifies them more closely with the latter. The companies' combative actions are keyed as mimed and symbolic gestures, no matter how furious Torotoro haka, nor how forcefully Samudra kick. Once they are performing in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* these martial artists become dancers. A similar change seems to occur to the men's indigenous identities. In the theatre, especially before a Western audience, Torotoro and Samudra become men performing their Māori and Malayāli ethnicities. They are potentially rekeyed as minstrels.

In his essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" Ralph Ellison considers how the African American minstrel's appearance – "hands gloved in white and his face blackened with cork or greasepaint" – contributes to his role:

This mask, this wilful stylization of the natural face and hands, was imperative for the evocation of that atmosphere in which the fascination of blackness could be enjoyed, the comic catharsis achieved (Ellison 1964:49).

In Edinburgh, Torotoro and Samudra might be seen to have performed a comparable 'mask' of their Māori and Malayāli ethnicities. Through their performance of wero, haka and *meiipayāttu*, they presented as men from cultures "locked into immutable tradition" like the Frozen Māori that Belich finds described in New Zealand settlers' writing (Belich 1994:26).

They played the part of “primitive-for-moderns” that MacCannell sees in tourist entertainments (MacCannell 1992:34). Samudra’s *bharatanāṭyam* and *haṭha-yoga* offers no contradiction to this keying. Torotoro disrupt it intermittently with their breaking. Chapter One considered how Torotoro might engage in a subversive self-minstrelsy that denaturalises and historicises the pervasive images of the anachronistic Other that they embody. The company’s b-boy personae, however, might be seen as African American masks – adopted to accommodate their Western audiences greater familiarity with the culture of the USA than that of Polynesia.

In *Ethnic Drag*, Sieg suggests performance of one’s own ethnicity can be a kind of “parodic militance [sic]” (Sieg 2002:253). The success of such militancy, she proposes, is dependent upon the degree of “critical (and comic) distance” that separates the performers from their minstrel role (Sieg 2002:222). Elements of Torotoro and Samudra’s martial dance theatre might suggest their detachment from the identities they perform. At points, in *Mika HAKA*, Torotoro appear to parody their ethnicity. They drop the athleticism and braggadocio of the kaiwero and b-boy to dance to Mika’s crooning rendition of two 1950s NZ pop songs.⁷ They soften their limbs, lighten their step and loosen their timing to perform a pastiche of cliché movements from Māori action songs and Pacific Island dances, to which they add quirky articulations and accents. They spoof their own culture. Samudra’s costuming decisions indicate that the company has insight about the erotic impact of their marital personae and their staging of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu*. When performing in their conservative home region they often choose to wear loose open-seamed trousers instead of *leṅgoṭṭi*. They have developed this costume to carefully reduce – but not entirely remove – the eroticism of their dance. The cut of the garment means that when the men are standing, it hangs straight,

⁷ “Pearly Shells” (lyrics and music by Webley Edwards and Leon Pober) and “Haere mai, Everything is Kapai” (lyrics and music by Sam Freedman).

modestly covering their legs, but when they lunge, stride or kick, it falls away exposing the men's upper thighs.

Torotoro's clowning and Samudra's costuming choices demonstrate the companies' ability to modify their stage personae, but this capacity is not necessarily the critical distance that Sieg says is central to parodic militancy. By converting Māori and Malayāli martial arts and traditional culture into exotic mimetic capital *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* may execute rekeyings of the kind that Sontag explores in "Notes on Camp." Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance appears to "dethrone the serious" (Sontag 1966:276). It prioritises sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content (Sontag 1966:287).

Martial dance theatre rekeys the martial arts as theatrical entertainment, and the martial arts are already rekeyings of antique combat. It could be argued that the genre amplifies the diminution of warfare that is achieved by the ritualised and codified martial arts activities that it stages. The combative actions of intimidation displays and pattern practices, may be seen to retain a vestigial utility – what Klens-Bigman calls a "potentially deadly practicality" (Klens-Bigman 2007). In *Mika HAKA*, Mokoera wields hard wooden weapons with dangerous force, and in *The Sound of Silence*, Madhu and Sajeev execute *nerkal* with explosive momentum. Yet in the theatrical contexts in which they perform these actions, their danger is definitively confined by the stage. The men's prowess may seem about to overspill this frame, but the conventions of the theatre promise the audience that it will remain safely contained. Consequently, they are entertained, rather than intimidated, by the men's display of imminent force. In Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre the antagonistic threat of their actions is vital, but only so far as it contributes to the companies' capacity to put on a good show. The appearance of their martial actions is the priority in their productions.

Mika HAKA and *The Sound of Silence* might also meet Sontag's criteria for camp by being "depoliticized – or at least apolitical" performances (Sontag 1966:277). Torotoro and

Samudra are indigenous citizens of post-colonial nations. Life in their homelands is shaped by the legacies of British rule. They live within societies whose mores sustain gender and racial norms empathetic with Western patriarchal values. It could be argued that the companies' performances in Edinburgh perpetuated the legacies and values of colonial history. Their martial dance theatre affirms essentialist typifications of 'native' men as once potent military figures, now outstripped by global change – men left behind. Their theatrical rekeying of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* – their diminutions of combat – reinforce Eurocentric ideas of their people's as frozen in immutable tradition. *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, like the tourist's entertainment MacCannell examines, keys Torotoro and Samudra as primitives whose role is to confirm, by contrast, that their audiences are 'moderns' (MacCannell 1992:34). The companies may fail to escape the dangers Sieg sees when performers perform their own ethnicity: their martial dance theatre may lend "corporeal proof" to the stereotypes that primitivist discourse attributes to them (Sieg 2002:222).

Torotoro and Samudra's Western audiences may not see *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* as upkeyings of the Māori and Malayāḷi martial arts. The companies' renditions of these disciplines are laminated, rekeyed by the men's theatricality and the effects of the aesthetics of transfer. They are remote from usual contemporary practice of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu*, and even further removed from Māori and Malayāḷi historic practices of warfare. But their Western audiences' are not privy to the models that Torotoro and Samudra have adopted. Nor do they know quite what processes of adaptation the companies have deployed. Their Edinburgh audiences' gaze may have 'downkeyed' their performances.

Downkeying is a process in which, says Goffman, an audience become "'genuinely' involved" in an activity, as if it were untransformed, though it is in fact serially rekeyed and deeply layered (Goffman 1975:364). Mokoera enacts his challenge to the void of the auditorium, instead of a ritual recipient. Madhu and Sajeev carefully align their *nerkal* with

the drum's regular beat, instead of responding to their *kālarippayaṭṭu* master's commands. Western audiences may interpret these performances as exhibitions of Māori and Malayāli marital arts proper. Torotoro and Samudra's emphasis on spectacle – surface over content – may present their marital arts as emasculated disciplines, which is how McDonald sees *kālarippayaṭṭu* rekeyed through its performance for tourists (McDonald 2007:160). Torotoro and Samudra's rekeying of wero, haka and *meippayaṭṭu* as dance may affirm the kinds of supremacist values Young finds in Gobineau's theories, affirming that non-white men are members of "female or feminized races" (Young 1995:109).

This line of argument can be challenged with reference to Meyer's revision of Sontag's analysis of camp in his essay "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp" (Meyer 1994). Seen in the light of Meyer's ideas, the spectacle and entertainment of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* need not indicate that Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre is without political significance, nor compliant with neocolonial values. Meyer suggests that camp is a form of parody. The marginalised and disenfranchised 'piggy-back' their own "alternative signifying codes into discourse by attaching them to existing structures of signification" (Meyer 1994:11). In *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*, Torotoro and Samudra's embodiment of Western stereotypes of native men may have promoted values and agendas divergent from those that such figures are ordinarily recruited to endorse.

For example, Torotoro's performance in *Mika HAKA* evokes the enduring association of Māori men with the Ancient Warrior. Mokoera in particular exemplifies the physical attributes, weaponry skills and countenance that constitute this figure. Yet the production juxtaposes his performance with that of the Māori b-boy. Indeed, at different moments in *Mika HAKA*, all the men of the company perform aspects of each role. The production's integration of traditional local and contemporary global modes of performance keys the Ancient Warrior as a construct, different in form but not substance from the hip-hop identity

electively adopted by Māori b-boys. Mika's presence in *Mika HAKA* (and his executive influence on the production) also keys both Torotoro's Ancient Warriors and Brown B-boys as exotic-erotic figures. This observation need not imply that the dancers were committed to this agenda. In rehearsal, Mika and Torotoro's creative dialogue centred on the contemporising of the kaiwero and naturalizing of the b-boy. His queer messages were, in a sense, piggybacked on these concerns. The (homo)eroticism of *Mika HAKA* might be understood as Mika and the dancers' co-creation. However, if the production's juxtaposition of stereotypical identities promoted a queer socio-political sensibility – which, says Meyer, posits the Self to be “performative, improvisational, discontinuous” – then this message should be attributed to Mika (Meyer 1994:2-3).

The ambiguity of meaning in Samudra's martial dance theatre is a consequence of a comparable meeting of differing agendas. Madhu and Sajeev created their performance in their homeland's conservative society, where deviations from traditional dance forms and narrative themes risks censure. *The Sound of Silence* is innovative performance but its abstraction invites diverse interpretation. The production eschews explicit engagement with any topic – sacred or profane. Madhu and Sajeev's duets can be seen to express a queer male intimacy. In “Soul,” “Rhythm,” and “Body” the audience can observe the dancers' personal physical intimacy and complicit collaboration, while the men present a complex stage relationship, tensioned by tender affection and outburst of conflict. Samudra may or may not have intended to use the abstraction of *meipayāṭṭu*, *nṛtta* and *asana* to closet sexuality in their martial dance theatre. The homoeroticism and queerness of their martial dance theatre might be attributed, instead, to the operation of a Western gaze. When the production was performed in contexts such as Edinburgh, a contemporary Western engagement with sexuality may have ‘piggybacked’ such significance onto their abstract dance.

Samudra's martial dance theatre might, however, be seen to queer *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* in a formal sense. They use the martial discipline to create sensual relationships – both between the performers on stage, and between the performers and their audience. It becomes rekeyed as an expressive rather than utilitarian discipline. In this way, *The Sound of Silence* makes bold, and extends further, the transvaluation of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* that has occurred since the early 1990s – through its reformation as an exhibition practice in the 1930s, its recruitment as a totemic emblem of Kerala culture in the 1950s, and its ever-increasing role as a tourist attraction. When watching *The Sound of Silence*, Madhu and Sajeew's impassive faces and distant gazes renders their relationship to the iconic warrior archetypes they replicate unclear. It is not possible to know whether they stage *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* to affirm and celebrate the substance of this figure, or to interrogate, subvert and queer it by transforming their martial art into a dance. Indeed, as Meyer notes, because camp piggy-backs on the dominant order's modes and means of signification it might be seen to also always reinforce that dominant order (Meyer 1994:11).

It may be that the queer expressions of sexuality and queer socio-political comment that Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre presents are as much a consequence of the genre's formal structure as the performers intentions. The dance theatre frame in which the companies perform invests their martial movements with an erotic potential. Wero, haka and *meippayaṭṭu* may imply violent intent, but in the companies' productions this possibility is nullified. These martial activities become, instead, repertoires of spectacular movements that create masculinist exhibitions of male bodies, staged for the audience's pleasure. When a combative focus is sustained in intimidation displays and pattern practices they are keyed as utilitarian activities. The physically intimate homosociality of the male participants is keyed as that of 'brothers in arms'. In martial dance theatre, however, this focus is removed.

Torotoro and Samudra are not troops, but troupes. Their homosociality is more sensual than

functional, more that of a male chorus line – ‘brothers linking arms’. This combined with the erotic potential of their bodily displays, promotes the homosexual potential of their homosocial groups. Moreover, it invites consideration of how such potential may reside in the martial disciplines on which their choreography is based. Maybe the utilitarian focus of wero, haka and *meippayāṭṭu* holds in suspension their homoerotic dimensions, and keys them as heteronormative practices.

Moreover, martial dance theatre might be considered a genre that intrinsically furthers a queer cultural critique. Its performance of the martial arts as theatre exposes the theatricality through which these disciplines contribute to the performative construction of ethnically specific identities. Torotoro and Samudra’s staging of idealised warrior persona for Western audiences exposes their martial arts as repertoires of stylized acts that articulate ideal Māori and Malayāḷi masculinities. In her essay “Critically Queer,” Butler determines that a central strategy of the “queer movement” is the “publicization of theatrical agency” – the uncovering of the mechanisms by which identities arise (Butler 1997:16). Martial dance theatre’s camp emphasis on the impressive surface of the martial arts – rather than their combative content, which is usually emphasised – might be seen to contribute to a queer publicising of their theatrical agency and the production of martial artists’ masculinities as “the legacy of sedimented acts” (Butler 1990a:274).

Perhaps martial dance theatre is only as queer as its performers and audiences. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick says that it requires “only a slight shift of optic” to see the similarities between those activities sanctioned as male homosocial bonding, and those deemed homosexual and taboo (Sedgwick 1985:89). Similarly, martial dance theatre’s capacity to endorse or critique the warrior identities it stages is contingent upon audiences’ attitudes to such identities – which they might hold to be ‘essential’ and true, or negotiable, performative constructs. The genre could be seen to involve a

“double address,” of the kind that Sieg attributes in *Ethnic Drag* to both drag (female impersonation) and self-minstrelsy (Sieg 2002:229). Sieg says that these kinds of performances address two parties: “While the dupe sees mimesis, the in-group sees drag” (Sieg 2002:17). The in-group, she suggests, see drag and self-minstrelsy as theatrical inflations of a performative identity, while the out-group of ‘dupes’, the “hegemonic spectators,” see them as forms of mimesis, which with varying accuracy replicate verities of gender or race (Sieg 2002:17). The ‘in-out’ division detailed by Sieg recurs in Balme’s analysis of intercultural theatre. In *Pacific Performances* he proposes that Polynesian performers address “on the one hand the colonizing majority and on the other hand, other members of the indigenous culture” (Balme 2007:15). Totoro and Samudra’s performances before Edinburgh audiences could be described as a face-off between two such parties. Overall, however, the model of double address does not adequately convey the diversity of audience experiences to which their martial dance theatre gives rise.

In his 1997 essay, “Camp, Masculinity, Masquerade,” Kim Michasiw’s description of “the camp-performative” complicates the in-group and out-group binary (Michasiw 1997:161). He proposes that in this mode of parody the “apparent intent of the object on display” is overturned by “the small ‘subversive’ detail” (Michasiw 1997:163). An audience may respond to this intervention in number of ways: it may go unnoticed; it may be perceived as mistake – an error, or failure, on the performers part to approximate the norm – and be dismissed or criticised; or it may be recognised as a cue that says ‘this is rekeying’ – a rekeying the audience may or may accept or reject, as inappropriate mockery, sharp parody or frivolous fun. The camp performative, says Michasiw, positions its audience “in ranges of ironic contract” to

the performance staged (Michasiw 1997:161). These he characterises as being occupied variously by:

those who do not know at all; those who think they know but do not know; those who know, but only from without and are afraid really to know; those who do know but are appalled, or are laughing, or are laughing at the wrong pitch; and you (Michasiw 1997:161).

Using Michasiw's model, martial dance theatre may be seen to stratify its audience according to: their understanding of the genre as an affirmation or refutation of Eurocentric norms defining race and gender; their perception of the essential truth or performativity of these norms; the audience's sense of affinity with what they assume to be the performers' attitudes to the norms approximated, or parodied, in their performance; and the audience's capacity to enjoy any discrepancy between theirs and the performers' viewpoint on these matters.

As in any performance, audience perceptions may shift during a martial dance theatre performance – deepening or inverting, consolidating or splintering – thus altering the ironic contract in play. This shifting is particularly prominent in the case of martial dance theatre because the genre simultaneously involves three keyings: that of antique means of warfare as a hereditary marital art; that of such martial art as innovative dance theatre; and, via the aesthetics of transfer, that of such innovative dance theatre as an international festival production with an exotic-erotic allure. In Goffman's terms each of these transformations has added a "layer or lamination," which contributes its own particular glossing to the martial actions performed (Goffman 1975:82). What is more, these laminations invest martial dance theatre performers with a multiple identity – as descendents of warriors, contemporary martial artists, avant-gardists in their homelands, and 'native' entertainers when abroad. The ways in which these roles coalesce or conflict contributes to shifts in the ironic contract between martial dance theatre performers and their audiences.

Combining Michasiw's range of ironic contract and Goffman's frame analysis helps explain the diversity of audience experiences that martial dance theatre seems to invite. At one extreme, Torotoro and Samudra's Edinburgh performances of *Mika HAKA* and *The*

Sound of Silence might be seen as examples of naïve indigenes performing military drills on stage – natives unwittingly cast as sexual objects through their transportation abroad. At another extreme, these productions could be characterised as shows by cosmopolitan minstrels who deliberately ‘camp up’ their performative identities for a combination of political and commercial objectives. This duality could be described using MacCannell’s analysis of intercultural interactions in *Empty Meeting Grounds*. Torotoro and Samudra’s performance of Ancient Warrior identities in their martial dance theatre may appear to be a device of “rhetorical weaponry” empowering these non-Western performers in their engagement with Western culture (MacCannell 1992:168). This possibility, however, remains always shadowed by the alternative understanding that these performances fulfil Eurocentric stereotypes in such a way that they are men “volunteering to be exploited” by that hegemony (MacCannell 1992:8). This is the duality that Lee evokes in “Bodies, Revolutions, and Magic.” The central question of her article might be asked of martial dance theatre:

How does one distinguish between the cultural nationalist fetish and other, less hallowed, versions of racialized styles – among them stereotypes, caricatures, and fantasies – that had previously been employed in the service of oppressive and exploitative systems (Lee 2001:7)?

It might be argued that, like their audience, the performers of martial dance theatre are situated on a comparable range of ironic contract with their own multiply laminated performances. In particular, differences in their relationships to the exoticism and erotic potential of their performances contributes to the genre’s complexity, and participant artists’ contestation of its form and focus. Such contestations arose when Torotoro and Samudra collaborated in India in January 2009.⁸ Torotoro (represented by Mokoera, Taupuhi and Kasina Rose Campbell) wanted to pursue the sexualisation of their martial dance theatre, and expand their overt juxtaposition of popular cultural references (such as breaking) and inherited martial arts and dance practices. Samudra wanted to focus, instead, on developing a

⁸ Torotoro visited Samudra in Thiruvananthapuram from the 1st to the 25th of January 2009.

staged progression from antagonistic martial movements to harmonious expressive dance, and a reconciliation of the tensions inherent in the juxtaposition of the marital arts and dance, and the meeting of the collaborating companies' contrasting cultures.

Beyond the generic similarities that link Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre, each company's performance practice reflects the different historical and contemporary tensions of their homelands. Torotoro's performance of martial actions extends the pre-colonial Māori practices of wero and haka, in which antagonistic movements are ritualised to become a means of communication. The wero and haka seen in *Mika HAKA* are theatricalisations of inherited ritualised practices. Moreover, since European settlement of New Zealand, Māori have performed these ritualised martial acts in intercultural meetings, both politically – to assert their first nation status – and commercially. Torotoro's martial dance theatre might be seen as part of this ongoing practice. Furthermore, Torotoro grew up as marginalised indigenous people in a multi-cultural society, permeable to global cultural trends and American culture in particular. In such a context, activities like the wero and haka offer participants a means of connection to their ancestral past, while also investing them with an exotic aura (particularly when combined with elements of fashionable African American culture) that empowers them in their interactions with contemporaries of other ethnicities.

Samudra's performance of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* has a quite different lineage and domestic social position. Their martial dance theatre practice is a convergence of three distinct performance histories. On the one hand, it follows on from the avant-garde theatricalisation of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* begun by Chandralekha and furthered by Sheth. Yet it also replicates aspects of traditional Kerala idioms, such as *teyyam* and *kathakaḷi*, wherein *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* is rekeyed by ritual protocols or classical aesthetics. From another perspective, Samudra's martial dance theatre extends the CVN style's aestheticisation of *kaḷarippayaṭṭu* – both within the *kaḷari* and in public displays. Furthermore, Samudra have grown up in a particularly egalitarian state

of independent India. Kerala's public discourse emphasises equality and participation in a certain cultural uniformity, which both sustains regional unity and promises individual citizens social advancement. Contrastingly, as citizens of a bicultural nation Torotoro lived with, and performed, a sense of being Other – an identity imposed upon them, yet also strategically enhanced by them. While Samudra's martial dance theatre explores Othering qualities attributed to their lower caste communities, it avoids suggesting the men's insoluble difference from their compatriot audiences, who belong to many castes and faith communities. Samudra's performance necessarily emphasises the attested ideals of sameness and universality that dominate Kerala society, and India as a whole.

The particular circumstances of Torotoro and Samudra's homeland cultures position the companies in differing degrees of ironic contract to their martial dance theatre, and differing degrees of critical distance from the socio-political messages their performances may communicate. Torotoro's performance of *Mika HAKA* demonstrates a self-conscious experience of being indigenous Others – of being exoticised (and somewhat eroticised) by their marginal position in their post-colonial homeland, and of being strategically differentiated as Māori by political discourse. Moreover, when performing *Mika HAKA* in Edinburgh in 2003, Torotoro's men included urban and rural Māori, and Pasifika people who identified (to differing degrees) with the kaiwero, b-boy and pan-tribal (pan-Polynesian) identities that the production presented. Because of this internal diversity the company's performance was informed by a collective awareness that indigeneity, though widely reified in New Zealand, is a contestable and performed construct.

In comparison, Samudra's performance of *The Sound of Silence* might be seen to reflect Madhu and Sajeev's ambivalence about the value of their Otherness as lower caste people – a difference that by its very nature is always a question of degree. Samudra understand the mimetic capital value of their native Malayāḷi identity within in India.

Immediately prior to creating *The Sound of Silence* Madhu and Sajeev danced often in North Indian metropolises. They suggest they were chosen to do so because of the exotic allure that their South Indian identities exerted in these cities (Gopinath and Vakkom 2006). Yet while India is dominated by discourse that promotes regional pride, it is also permeated with political and religious assertions of the value of unity within and beyond the state. Moreover, Kerala is a culture more tensioned with issues of class and caste than those of ethnicity or race. Torotoro and Samudra's different relationships to being Other can be seen to have influenced the ways in which the companies have assimilated the perspectives gained through their international performing. Whereas Torotoro's inherent sense of being 'Other' became more accentuated by performing overseas, such travel appears to have deepened Samudra's desire to find universal connections across cultural borders.

In *Mika HAKA* it seems clear that Mika is deliberately and ironically enacting the role of a 'native' man – a role from which his adoption and sexuality hold him in some distance. Mokoera, however, has no comparable life experiences. When he enacts the wero actions in *Mika HAKA* he plays the non-specific theatrical role of 'Te Māori', but he may do so without questioning the essential substance or processual performativity of his own iwi-specific masculine identity. If Torotoro and Samudra's performances are seen as interrogating gender and ethnicity, as Mika's does, this keying might be attributed – like the queerness of Madhu and Sajeev's duets – to the perspective of their Western audiences, rather than these artists' intentions. Yet, whatever its causes, martial dance theatre does give rise to a flirtation with both essentialist and performative understandings of indigenous identities. The genre's flirtatious ambiguity might be connected to a central ambiguity in the martial arts activities that it stages.

The martial arts rekey antagonistic combat as complicit play with an expressive potential. In these disciplines there is a distance between what seems to be happening and

what is intended. Anthropologist Lowell J. Lewis characterises this gap in his book *Ring of Liberation*, which examines *capoeira*. In this Brazilian martial practice participants play with near miss kicks. Lowell says *capoeira* “flirts with violence and aggression” (Lewis 1992:59). This description might be applied to the intimidation displays of the wero and haka or pattern practice of CVN *meippayāṭṭu*. Imminent violent potential is implied but necessarily never manifest. If it were, the instant at hand would become a fight. The climactic explosion of aggression is necessarily held in perfect and perpetual abeyance.

In a 2008 *Gay Times* article, Mark Simpson says that suggestive sexual imagery has an erotic power that more explicit imagery lacks: “Because it never quite delivers, it never disappoints”(Simpson 2008). Similarly, it might be argued that because codified and ritualised martial exchanges never quite deliver the violence they imply, they too never disappoint. They promise a terrible hostility that, if it were to transpire, might not be as impressive and entertaining as the possibilities their threat sustains. In martial dance theatre, the flirtation with danger that Lowell addresses and the flirtation with sexuality that Simpson notes seem to converge. The genre stages the martial arts to create displays of men that have an erotic potential. The performers’ actions are alternately antagonistic and inviting. The genre commingles messages of martial and sexual intent, and its performers show fluctuating degrees of commitment to both. Flirtation might be seen as the *modus operandi* of the martial dance theatre genre. Investigation of this idea allows me to gather together various strands of my analysis.

In his essay “Flirtation” (first published in 1909),⁹ Georg Simmel states that flirtation is “the threat that is not seriously intended” (Simmel 1984:138). In his 2002 essay “Flirting” Alan Radley develops this idea. He proposes that flirtation is contingent on the person addressed recognising the initiator’s ‘threat’ as an invitation to play (Radley 2002:83).

⁹ This essay was first published as “Psychologie der Koketterie,” *Der Tag*, Berlin, May 11-12, 1909.

Through this recognition a transvaluation occurs, comparable to that which Bateson discusses in “A Theory of Play and Fantasy.” Speaking of animal play, Bateson says: “The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite” (Bateson 1972:180). Flirtation requires a moment of recognition that rekeys the actor’s actions as expressive gestures, but not necessarily expressive of the intention that such actions might ordinarily imply. Flirtation breaks the concomitancy of action and intention. In Radley’s words, flirtation results in “gesture being negated as a symptom of desire” (Radley 2002:79). Flirtation is the performance of actions in such a way that they become gestures of ambiguous intent.

Flirtation depends upon the maintenance of this ambiguity. This includes, says Adam Phillips in the introduction to his book *On Flirtation*, sustaining the possibility that the action implied may actually occur (Phillips 1994:xxi). Paradoxically, however, a flirtation must always simultaneously promise that some action different to that implied may also occur: the playful nip might become a painful bite, or a gentle nibble instead. Radley develops Simmel’s analysis to suggest a flirtatious action is constructed by a refusal of commitment; it sustains “the antithesis of accommodation and denial,” acceptance and rejection (Radley 2002:74). In Simmel’s analysis, focused on coquettes, the moment of flirtation is tensioned by the “movement between having and not-having – or, rather, this symbolic interpenetration of the two” (Simmel 1984:135). This leads him to describe three key modes of flirtation:

Flirtation as flattery: ‘Although you might indeed be able to conquer me, I won’t allow myself to be conquered.’ Flirtation as contempt: ‘Although I would actually allow myself to be conquered, you aren’t able to do it’. Flirtation as provocation: ‘Perhaps you can conquer me, perhaps not – try it!’ (Simmel 1984:135).

Simmel’s principal interest is with sexual flirtation, but as Lowell’s use indicates the word ‘flirt’ has implications beyond its overt sexual connotations. Indeed, Simmel describes flirtation in ways redolent of both Sieg’s ideas about critical distance and Michasiw’s concept of ranges of ironic contract. Simmel says:

flirtation leaves tangible reality and enters a vacillating and fluctuating category [...] A scale of graduated phenomena leads from the assertion that is really made in complete seriousness, in which only a touch of self irony is barely perceptible, to the paradox or the outrageous humility that leaves us in doubt as to whether the speaker is making a fool of himself or us (Simmel 1984:138).

Simmel's analysis of flirtation might be used to consider the messages martial dance theatre performers communicate to their audience, through their combination of antagonistic and inviting actions and their performance of an exotic identity. 'I won't allow myself to be conquered.' 'You aren't able to conquer me.' 'Try it!' These phrases could serve to describe the mixture of sexual ambivalence and post-colonial politics that tension the performer-audience relationship that martial dance theatre creates. What is more, in differing degrees and at different times, martial dance theatre performers display the complete seriousness, hints of self-irony, and outrageous self-mockery that Simmel also attributes to the flirt.

The Western theatrical conventions that frame martial dance theatre oppose a flirtation with violence of the kind that Lowell describes. In this frame, such play with physical injury is ruled out. It is clear that martial dance theatre performers will not attack their audience, or each other, but their aggressive actions do create a visceral charge – one that could, perhaps, be played out in other interactions. A sexual frisson is present. The ways in which martial dance theatre rekeys its performers' confrontational actions as spectacles may be seen to key them as potentially erotic flirtations.

Martial dance theatre also reveals that though the martial arts flirt with violence, the messages created by this flirtation are not all about violence. The confrontations of the wero and haka state the performers' self-worth, and their respect for the recipients whom their ritual acts address. *Kalarippayattu* is framed, overall, as a soteriological quest. When practitioners engage in ritualised combat they invite one another to make an inward journey, towards an engagement with the Eternal Present. Such explanations, however, are not definitive. Martial arts actions are laminated with many meanings. The complex messages implied by intimidation displays and pattern practices are made more indefinite by their

inclusion in martial dance theatre. Their customary messages are destabilised by their framing as theatre, and their flirtatious structure – their capacity to communicate something other than violence through violence – is made more volatile. In Edinburgh, however, the martial actions in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* were so framed that their potential to communicate erotic messages became particularly prominent. The productions engaged with Eurocentric tropes concerning gender, ethnicity and race that positioned Torotoro and Samudra as objectified Others. The primitivist discourse evoked keyed them as amorphously sexualised figures.

Martial dance theatre creates a particular confusion about the degree to which the genre's performers are flirting with, and through, the archetypal Othering identities their performance enacts. On stage, their martial actions are rekeyed as expressive gestures. This might suggest the performers' are deliberately performing their native identities also – theatricalising these constructs. Yet at the same time, the primitivist tropes that the genre evokes counteracts this notion, suggesting that the men are, instead, merely presenting their authentic native selves. In a sense, the prejudice of an imperialist and patronizing gaze implies a concomitancy of action and intention in the genre. This keys the performers' gestures on stage not as flirtations, but 'as symptoms of desire'. The essentialist ideas evoked by martial dance theatre might suggest that companies such as Torotoro and Samudra are never flirting, and that they always 'mean it'.

Martial dance theatre does not afford its Other performers the gap between action and intention – the performative licence – commonly accorded Western performers. The primitivist desire to see authentic natives does not invite performers such as Torotoro and Samudra to flirt with their indigeneity. It keys such performers as actual rather than virtual figures, or at least implies that they should be real in a way that might not be expected of Steven Heathcote, for example, when he dances the role of Spartacus. The martial actions of

martial dance theatre performers may always disappoint a Western audience, for they can only fail to display the ‘real’ substance that the genre’s exoticism leads their audiences to expect. Torotoro and Samudra’s martial actions are evidently theatrical, and not utilitarian nor dangerous. This failure to deliver also destabilises martial dance theatre performers’ ethnicity, for it raises questions over their capacity to meet Eurocentric evaluations of authenticity on this account too.

The exoticism of martial dance theatre places its performers in an irresolvable paradox. As exotic performances *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* are intrinsically contradictory. The productions simultaneously present Torotoro and Samudra as strange savages and familiar entertainers. The companies’ performances meet this dilemma in different ways. Mika’s stage presence makes evident the performativity of Torotoro’s identities. His persona queers gender and ethnicity so blatantly that it invites the audience to acknowledge the performativity of the indigenous warrior identities Torotoro present – and the inherent aestheticism and symbolic value of the wero and haka. Contrastingly, Samudra’s performance in *The Sound of Silence* does not make a comparable acknowledgement of the performativity of their indigenous identities. Samudra’s impassive faces and distant gaze sustains the appearance of the company being immersed in performance, rather than being aware of performing. Torotoro’s overt sexual flirtation in *Mika HAKA* particularly suggests the company’s comical and critical distance from their performance as a whole. It keys their martial dance theatre as satire. Inversely, perhaps Samudra’s more serious tone of performance suggests that their martial dance theatre aspires to the dignity of the heroic epic. Yet neither *Mika HAKA* nor *The Sound of Silence* resolves the dilemma in which the exoticism of martial dance theatre places its performers. *Mika HAKA* implies a lack of commitment on Torotoro’s part to notions of authenticity that pertain to the indigenous

identities that they perform. As such, they seem camp. On the other hand, Samudra's apparent commitment to the same values may be seen to make them appear naïve.

Phillips suggests: "Flirting may not be a poor way of doing something better, but a different way of doing something else" (Phillips 1994:xxii). In this light, what might be permitted for the performers of martial dance theatre by their flirtation with – and through – Othering tropes? The overriding paradox of martial dance theatre is that the genre coalesces through engagement with the Eurocentric gender and racial prejudice attendant on the intercultural arenas in which such productions are presented. Only on the international stage before a predominantly white, Western audience does the genre that this thesis identifies become manifest. It is before the gaze of such an audience that the performers' melding of indigenous and foreign performance practices creates a flirtation with performative and essentialist definitions that are attributed by Eurocentric thought to the performers' indigenous identities. Though the cultural difference between martial dance theatre performers and their audience may create inequalities in their exchange, this inequality also creates the genre.

To outline an avenue for future enquiry, it might be proposed that contemporary martial dance theatre and similar emergent genre are crucibles in which cultural identities are (re)articulated. It might be suggested that the encounter with a Western gaze is intrinsic to the articulation of so-called 'indigenous' identities. In her book *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* Radhika Mohanram suggests that the 'indigene' is "a deliberate retroactive construct" that emphasises local and specific identity traits over those that are global and general (Mohanram 1999:95). In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph R. Roach proposes that performances of cultural identity, of necessity, are also performances of what and who the performers think they are not (Roach 1996:5). As such, is indigenous identity an Other identity, best manifest in front of that identity which is not? Might martial dance theatre

afford an opportunity to refute essentialist indigenous identities constructed through colonial histories, and to evolve new strategic indigenous identities suited to the currents of globalisation? It seems that such a process may be dependent upon martial dance theatre performers' empathy with a performative understanding of identity, and their perception that such theorising may empower, rather than destabilise, their lives and careers.

Since commencement of the doctoral research that this thesis presents martial dance theatre has grown in global prominence and scope, giving rise to new works that may or may not conform to the definition of the genre developed through examination of *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. *Sutra* is one of these productions. It has had two runs at Sadler's Wells (London's main dance house), and is in its second year of international touring. The production has traversed Europe, and visited Canada, New Zealand and Shanghai. *Sutra* was created by Belgian dancer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, as a work for himself and eighteen monks from Song Shan Shaolin Temple in Henan (China) – known as the legendary birthplace of *kung fu*. My analysis of the production develops from viewing Deborah May's film of the production made at Sadler's Wells in 2008 (May 2008). As a consequence of Cherkaoui's prominence in European contemporary dance and the monks' place in global popular culture, *Sutra* has attracted extensive comment by dance critics to which I also refer.

Cherkaoui explains that he created *Sutra* to give kung fu a new aesthetic counter to that established by preceding popular theatrical keyings of the form (May 2008). In *The New Statesman*, Flora Bagenal proposes that Cherkaoui wanted to “replace the kitsch costumes and Chinese escalator music used in most modern Shaolin shows with something more tasteful” (Bagenal 2008). The shows to which Bagenal refers have toured the world since the 1990s, including visits to Edinburgh where I was amongst the audience. They often feature bare-chested men dressed in flame orange trousers moving in ranks, like soldiers or a chorus line, or performing circus feats of strength and endurance, such as being carried aloft on the points

of spears. Such shows often have sets representing temple gates or statues of the Buddha, and use distinctly Chinese and martial music.

Sutra rekeys kung fu as highbrow Western dance theatre. The production's designer is respected British sculptor Antony Gormley. The monks wear identical grey, long sleeved tunics, and, later on, dark Western suits. The set is a white dance floor boxed in by pale grey curtains. There are also numerous person-sized wooden boxes, which the monks continually rearrange. Their passage amongst these configurations evokes various scenario, such as statues in a temple, guards patrolling ramparts, and the blooming of a giant lotus flower.

The monks' choreography in *Sutra* is simple. British critic Lynette Halewood calls it "spectacular massed moves" (Halewood 2008). The men perform Cherkaoui's montages and spatial rearrangements of their *kung fu* pattern practices (May 2008). For example, lined up in a column behind one another, in canon they kick, punch, lunge and leap on and off a low platform made from the boxes. The effect is like a piece of time-lapse photography, or the choreographic techniques of Busby Berkley. Canadian critic Tao Fei describes the monks' corporeal style: "swooping grace, percussive attack, unpredictable shifts in weight and direction" (Fei 2009). *Sutra* also has one section of spectacular acrobatics, featuring flying kicks, airborne cartwheels and leaping forward rolls.

The production's musicians take their timing from the monks (May 2008). Szymon Brzóska leads the five-person string, piano and percussion ensemble that performs his original score. The music is often atonal and lament-like, though some sections feature a simple looping melodic motifs and a pulsing drum. Halewood contrasts the "dark-toned and contemplative" music with the monk's "punchy and rhythmic" movement, and Pringle describes this "counterpoint" as creating a tension between the two (Pringle 2010; Halewood 2008). London critic Judith Mackrell suggests the music in *Sutra* provides an emotional frame for the monks' movements (May 2008). This observation is important to understanding

martial dance theatre. Brzóška's music laminates the monks' potentially instrumental actions with a dark emotionality that makes them into expressive movements. In a comparable way, the song lyrics and Mika's speeches in *Mika HAKA* rekey Torotoro's wero and haka as sexualised and animalistic expression, and the *mantra* and *śruti* of *The Sound of Silence* rekey Samudra's *meippayāṭṭu* actions as gestures in a spiritual ceremony.

In London's *Evening Standard* newspaper, Sarah Frater describes *Sutra* as "an elegy and fanfare combined" (Frater 2008). Her comment sums up the ways in the monks' actions are keyed by the production's melancholic yet determined music, and monochromatic yet monumental set. For example, while mournful legato strings play, the monks lie down in a configuration of the boxes redolent of a necropolis. Contrastingly, in the show's final section, vigorous drumming and an allegro melody accompanies the monks' rapid execution of a kicking and striking pattern practice. The commingling of lament and celebration in *Sutra* keys the monks as examples of what Terry Jay Ellingson in his book *The Myth of the Noble Savage* calls the "living contemporary myth" of the Noble Savage (Ellingson 2001: xiii). The production frames the monks in such a way that they seem to embody both vitality and anachronistic obsolescence. At times, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* evoke similar nostalgia, but it is in *Sutra* that martial dance theatre's romance with a bittersweet commemoration of the Ancient Warrior is most clearly articulated.

Like Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre productions, *Sutra* is 'exotic,' in the particular way that Balme discusses. Mackrell says the production both intensifies "the mystery" of *kung fu* and "opens up new views" of the discipline (Mackrell 2008). British critic Benjamin Goode encapsulates the balance to which she alludes. He says that *Sutra* contains "Just enough mystery" (Goode 2010). The production frames a strange performance

by Other men in the familiar aesthetic of Western contemporary dance productions. The scenography of *Sutra* is almost identical to Cherkaoui's earlier production *Zero Degrees*.¹⁰

Mika HAKA and *The Sound of Silence* evoke the contradictory masculine and feminine archetypes which primitivist discourse attributes to 'native' men. Critical comment on *Sutra*, however, repeatedly describes the monks' duality not as one of gender, but one in cosmic terms. Pringle sees the monks as "Part human, part animal" (Pringle 2010). Her analogy, however, is not disparaging like the 'Black savage' stereotype Belich explores, which portrays Māori as "less human and more animal than [...] the civilised European" (Belich 1994:14). The Belgian publicity materials for *Sutra* elaborate on the duality Pringle is suggesting; it says that the monks combine "animal inspiration and spiritual surges" (Toneelhuis 2008). British critic Leonora Oppenheim carries this analogy to a further degree of abstraction, saying the monks' movement is a meeting of "spiritual and physical symbolism" (Oppenheim 2008). And Bagenal describes the monk's *kung fu* as "violent, disciplined, spiritual" arts (Bagenal 2008). In *Gone Primitive* Torgovnick says "the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive" (Torgovnick 1990:8)8. Critical response to *Sutra* suggests that martial dance theatre may meet a present Western desire to see in the primitive Other a synthesis of polarities – a wholeness.

Cherkaoui's engagement with the monks is driven by his interest in transcultural harmony. In her article "A Cosmopolite's Utopia: Limitations in the Generational Flemish Dance History Model" Lise Uytterhoeven explains that Cherkaoui's working process is inspired by Jiddhu Krisnamurti and Amin Malouf's ideas (Uytterhoeven 2009:8-9). These authors urge people to transcend their historical identities and become cosmopolitan, global citizens. In a speech in 2009, Cherkaoui said that by recognizing "multiplicity in oneself" one might realise that the Other "is often buried somewhere inside you too" (Cherkaoui 2009).

¹⁰ Akram Khan & Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, *Zero Degrees* (Debut: Sadlers Wells, London: July 2005).

Such rhetoric should not imply that *Sutra* evades the ethno-political tensions that pertain to *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*. Rather, it suggests that contemporary martial dance theatre, in differing degrees, enacts the contradictory and often simultaneous sexualisation and spiritualisation of primitive men that Torgovnick describes in *Primitive Passions* (Torgovnick 1997:14). Both tropes are evoked when Cherkaoui says that his interest in the martial arts began with his teen idol Bruce Lee, whom he considered both “sexy” and “mystical” (Cherkaoui 2010). Yet Cherkaoui’s choreography does not expressly eroticise the non-Western martial artist – as *Mika HAKA* does, and *The Sound of Silence* may do. Instead, *Sutra* spiritualises the encounter between Cherkaoui and the monks, and the monks and the audience. This, however, might be considered a different expression of Eurocentric essentialism.

At times in *Sutra*, Cherkaoui’s presence on stage is dwarfed by the monks’ virtuosity and unity. In other instants they become a Chinese chorus to his European protagonist. In one section he leads them in a seated gestural dance: he is the conductor or teacher. At the close of the performance he joins the monks in a pattern practice sequence, but his different ethnicity and movement quality ensures he is the key focus. Such factors lead Pringle to question if *Sutra* perpetuates a Western ‘Othering’ of the monks (Pringle 2010).

Sutra opens with Cherkaoui manipulating a model of the set. His actions trigger the monks’ performance. He seems to be displaying his command of the frame in which he and the monks perform. Pringle says: “thankfully his ‘god like’ persona is soon challenged and usurped” (Pringle 2010). In some ways, Cherkaoui’s relationship with the monks plays out that between the non-Western performers of martial dance theatre and their Western audiences. Pringle says that Cherkaoui treads upon “tenuous ground” by undertaking his intercultural collaboration with the monks, and in *Sutra* “tensions between the contemporary gaze and ancient wisdom are played out” (Pringle 2010). Yet her comments about the

animality and spirituality of the monks might be seen to collude in the reifying of these men as mystic ‘Oriental’ figures. Her review ends “These generous bodhisattvas offer themselves for our enlightenment!” (Pringle 2010). This high praise may obscure the men’s roles as professional international performers.

As a martial dance theatre work, *Sutra* (like *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence*) exploits the dichotomy of grace and utility that characterises the martial arts, and codified pattern practices in particular. In a published excerpt from his *Sutra* rehearsal diary, Cherkaoui says that though the monks’ every movement is beautiful many “could actually break your arm” (Cherkaoui and Mackrell 2008a). Mackrell makes a similar observation, describing the men as “beautiful” yet “maniacally dangerous” (Mackrell 2008). The monks’ movements – like Mokoera’s *wero* actions, and Samudra’s *meippayāttu* – may fascinate Western audiences because of the oppositions they conjoin: they are brutal and subtle, brave and sensitive, active and composed. Such pairings might be compared to the polarities that sustain Eurocentric gender norms. But in *Sutra* the conjunction of combative threat and refined control in the monks’ movements does not evoke a confusion of gender. Rather, it makes their performance distinct from Cherkaoui’s Western contemporary dance.

In his 2007 essay “Shaolin Temple: Birthplace of Zen” Matthew Polly (who trained at the Chinese government’s martial arts school in Shaolin) says the monks’ *kung fu* is comparable to “dance routines” (Polly 2007:148). Their pattern practices link martial actions into seamless fluid sequences, which are performed while addressing a void. Yet the monks’ movements never seem like dance in a conventional Western sense. This is made evident by the way in which their performance contrasts with Cherkaoui’s. His punches and kicks seem not to contain the potentially deadly practicality that theirs do. Writing in *The Telegraph* (London), Mark Monahan contrasts Cherkaoui’s “sylph-like delicacy” with the monks’ “belligerent physical prowess” (Monahan 2009). The monks heave and lug the boxes. When

caught inside, they kick and push against their walls. In contrast, Cherkaoui wanders amongst these monoliths. At one point he caresses and embraces a box in which he stands. Though the monks integrate qualities ordinarily polarised as archetypically masculine and feminine, *Sutra* keys Cherkaoui as ‘the male dancer’, with all that figure’s attendant tensions, which Burt’s and Fisher and Shay’s books explore. In contrast to him, the monks are paradigms of the ‘masculinity-as-activity’ that Dyer discusses.

Critics imply that the monks have an exceptionally concrete presence. Pringle says they bring to the stage “realness,” Monahan calls them “bona fide,” and Mackrell says that the monks are “being themselves” (Pringle 2010; Monahan 2009; Mackrell 2008). John Daly-Peoples, writing in *The New Zealand Business Review*, suggests that while Western dancers’ movements are distinct from their daily corporeal styles, the “traditional warrior monks” in *Sutra* perform movements from their everyday life (Daly-Peoples 2010). Daly-Peoples’ statement further indicates how Western audiences may see non-white martial artists as ‘real’ in a way that a Western dancer – a professional performer – is not. Indeed, *Sutra* is promoted as a display of something ‘actual’, rather than theatrical: the productions’ Belgium publicity says the monks’ *kung fu* is an “art that is also a life-style” (Toneelhuis 2008).

Critics suggest that *Sutra* is more than theatre. Pringle and Canadian critic Paula Citron both say it is a “ritual” (Pringle 2010; Citron 2009). This impression may arise from the monks’ quality of movement. Debra Craine in her London *Times* review of *Sutra* says the monks combine “outward energy” and “inner calm” (Craine 2008). In “Shaolin Temple” Polly calls Shaolin *kung fu* “yoga with attitude” (Polly 2007:148). Such a term might equally be applied to Samudra’s performance. The monks’ integration of careful form and impassioned intention could also be compared to the cool aesthetic evoked by Torotoro’s balance of ‘hot’ engagement and ‘cool’ reserve. The marital arts aestheticisation of violence, when staged in martial dance theatre, offers an explicit exhibition of the performer’s self-

control. Such skill is common to all performance, but is often concealed. The contradiction of hot violence and cool discipline makes it vivid and apparent. It gives martial dance theatre performers a peculiar demeanour. They are both combative and spectacular figures. Their attention is split between what Goffman calls the utilitarian and the pictographic. This ambiguity might be keyed as a vernacular display of cool, or indicative of a more mysterious state.

Critics distinguish *Sutra* from popularist *kung fu* shows that they describe as razzle-dazzle, action-packed circus (Frater 2008; Pringle 2010; Halewood 2008; Goode 2010). However, the production might be seen as revised continuation of this strain of martial dance theatre. In 2009 such a show, called *Shaolin Kung Fu*, visited New Zealand.¹¹ Its aesthetic was the antithesis of that of *Sutra*. The costuming used brightly coloured and sparkling Lycra, and the recorded music was mainly anthemic, Chinese tunes. The show centred on arresting stunts: one man performed a two fingered hand-stand on two small china bowls; one threw a pin clean through a sheet of glass; and another thrust a spear point into his throat without piercing his skin. Members of the audience were also invited on stage to punch a performer as hard as possible.

Sutra and *Shaolin Kung Fu* might be seen as highbrow and lowbrow examples of contemporary Chinese martial dance theatre. They share key elements. Each presents *kung fu* in a Western theatrical frame that keys them as activities with an aesthetic value. Moreover, though the choreography of *Shaolin Kung Fu* was not as complex as the montage and canon structures of *Sutra*, it also used changes in group formations and timing as the principle devices for making traditional martial pattern practices more rhythmically varied and spectacular. In one section, two groups – one dressed in black, the other in white – performed

¹¹ Chinese and Henan Provincial Governments, Chinese Embassy & New Zealand Chinese Henan Association present, *Shaolin Kung Fu* (Wellington, Alexandria, Christchurch: 28-31st October 2009).

slow-motion striking and kicking pattern practices. The groups' movements were so timed that their level changes, lunges and turns created a visual balance.

Significantly, both *Sutra* and *Shaolin Kung Fu* featured sections in which the male performers appeared topless. *Sutra* initially featured no such moments, but when the production visited New Zealand in 2010 instead of replacing their suits with their original grey tunics, the monks performed the show's closing sections bare-chested.¹² In both *Sutra* and *Shaolin Kung Fu*, there are moments charged with an erotic potential comparable to that foregrounded in *Mika HAKA*, and somewhat disavowed in *The Sound of Silence*. In these instances the performers' aggressive martial actions directly addressed to the audience are rekeyed as a bodily display for the audience's sensual delight. But critical comment suggests that the monks' performance did not have the sexualised dimension that might be seen in Torotoro and Samudra's martial dance theatre. Various factors might account for this difference. *Sutra* is presented in large theatres and the monks are distanced from their audience. They are figures in a grand stage picture. In contrast, the smaller Edinburgh black-box theatres in which Torotoro and Samudra performed gave audiences a close-up spectacle of near-naked bodies in action. The physical intimacy of this context emphasised the erotic potential of martial dance theatre.

Eurocentric prejudices may also be seen to neuter the Chinese monks, rendering their presence asexual. Richard Fung's analysis of gay pornography examines the workings of such tropes. In his essay "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn" he says that while the black man has been endowed with a hypersexuality "Asians, on the other hand, are collectively seen as undersexed" (Fung 1996:146). He expands, "whereas Fanon tells us, 'the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into penis. He is a penis,' the Asian man is defined by a striking absence down there" (Fung 1996:148). As 'brown' men, Torotoro might be seen to

¹² This detail was verified by colleagues who attended the performance.

possess something of the black man's potency. Samudra are darker skinned than Torotoro, but may be feminised by the lingering colonial vision of Indian men that Krishnaswamy describes. The monks, however, are celibate members of a holy order. In conjunction with the bias that Fung explores, this might be seen to definitively divorce their physicality from sexuality.

It remains to consider how the circumstance of the creation of *Sutra*, and the history of *kung fu*, further reveals how theatrical performance of the martial arts is implicated in the evolution of such disciplines. In a *Slate Magazine* article, "Return to the Shaolin Temple: A Lifetime of Devotion to Kung Fu," Polly explains that Shaolin *kung fu* shows began touring in the early 1990s to meet the economic and nationalist objectives of China's communist party (Polly 2003). Maoist policies repressed *kung fu* in general and the Shaolin temple explicitly, but new party leadership sought to exploit the financial and propaganda value of both. In 1989, the government opened Shaolin Wushu Centre to create *kung fu* performances for visiting tourists, and the school's shows have toured internationally, following a circuit established by Shanghai acrobats and the Peking Opera (Polly 2007:150). Cherkaoui recounts that the creation of *Sutra* was instigated by the abbot of Song Shan Shaolin Temple, Shi Yong Xin (May 2008). The production is a convergence of Cherkaoui's creative objectives and those of the abbot for his revitalisation of the temple. *Sutra* has allowed the temple to enter the global market for *kung fu* performances, seeded by the government's earlier tours.

The international scope of contemporary martial dance theatre productions – like *Sutra*, *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* – makes their rekeying of martial arts as dance theatre seem unusual. In particular, the aesthetics of transfer involved in this process seems destined to evoke primitivist tropes that are incongruous with the disciplines' postcolonial totemic cultural roles. These productions, however, are the most recent renderings of a long practiced transposition, and older rekeyings of the martial arts as dance theatre are now often

considered traditional performance, and are often presented in intercultural contexts. This thesis has explored the idea, encapsulated in Goffman's contrast of the boxer and the dancer, that to stage the martial arts transgresses the divide between the utilitarian and the aesthetic – a division which Berger's maxim (and its revision) has complicated with the polarity of masculine and feminine. The history of *kung fu* suggests that future research of martial dance theatre, from a non-Eurocentric perspective, might offer a different analysis of contemporary practice in the genre.

Jo Riley in her book *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance* says that performers of *jingju* ('Peking Opera') consider *da* (martial skills) one of the four that constitutes their craft (Riley 1997:266). In his article "Asian Martial Arts Cinema, Dance, and the Cultural Languages of Gender" Aaron D. Anderson proposes that *kung fu* and Chinese dance are "not necessarily in opposition in the way that their western counterparts are" (Anderson 2001:67). He recounts the legend that during a period of persecution the Shaolin monks perpetuated their forms by "disguising them as dance performance in the stylized Beijing Opera" (Anderson 2001:67). Anderson adds that in China "the connection between actual combat and representational dance-like combat has firmly continued" (Anderson 2001:67).

The contemporary practice of Shaolin *kung fu* is increasingly integrating theatrical components into this martial discipline. In his *Slate Magazine* article Polly suggests in the Shaolin tradition the way of the 'martial monk' has given way to the way of the 'performance monk' (Polly 2003). He describes the trainees at the government school in 2003 as "skilled martial artists who have basically tried out and won parts in the play Shaolin's Martial Monks" (Polly 2003). He contrasts these men with the students he knew in 1992 whom he describes as "martial monks first, performers a necessary second" (Polly 2003). Cherkaoui acknowledges that his collaboration with the temple's monks in *Sutra* did not introduce them

to the theatre. He says they are “used to performing *kung fu* [in] a show off, show piece sort of way” (Cherkaoui 2008b). When Bagenal observed the production’s early rehearsals she noted that Shaolin *kung fu* appears “closer to gymnastics than to a combat sport,” and she described the monks as “warrior ballerinas” (Bagenal 2008).

The publicity materials and critics’ comments about *Sutra* suggest that it restores integrity to a practice that had become artificial by replacing the lowbrow popular aesthetic of *kung fu* shows with a highbrow contemporary performance aesthetic. *Sutra* is, however, a theatrical rekeying of *kung fu*, not an ‘unkeying’ of theatre from this martial art. If the theatrical elements with which Shaolin *kung fu* is so deeply ingrained were removed, it would not be Shaolin *kung fu* at all. What martial dance theatre reveals is that the martial arts’ intimidation displays and pattern practice may not be dance, but they are not combat either. They are a particular and peculiar mode of movement practice that straddles the two.

Sutra verifies that the intimidation displays and pattern practices of the martial arts are aestheticised and stylised repertoires of actions and behaviours. Repetition of these memorials of antique warfare ascribes indigenous male participants with a special denotative value in their homelands. It keys them as embodiments of an ideal heroic masculinity. As such, these men’s martial mien acquires a totemic value as an encapsulation of national pride. The aesthetics of transfer involved in the international genre of contemporary martial dance theatre rekeys intimidation displays and pattern practices. It removes them from their domestic socio-political context, and places them in a Western dance theatre frame. Here they become spectacular exhibitions of male bodies in motion – modern versions of those performances of Otherness that MacCannell calls ‘primitives-for-moderns’ (MacCannell 1992:34). Martial dance theatre emphasises the visceral, erotic and mythical appeal of intimidation displays and pattern practices for Western audiences.

On the one hand, martial dance theatre might be seen to introduce the indigenous martial artist to a Eurocentric gaze, and its attendant gender, ethnic and racial bias. On the other hand, perhaps martial dance theatre actually reveals an address to the West embedded in non-Western martial arts practices today. The modification of these disciplines during the post-colonial era has been shaped by their increased role as totemic national emblems. Through presentation of these practices non-Western states declare their ethnic identities. Their value in this process is their capacity to command the Western gaze. They may modify Eurocentric tropes, which still dominate in global communications, but at the same time the spectacular figure of the martial artist often appears to reinforce them.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter summarises the propositions this thesis makes about how contemporary martial dance theatre is constructed, and the new perspectives this emergent genre affords about both the martial arts and intercultural audience-performer relations. It proceeds to a consideration of what part the martial arts might play in training performers whose gender, ethnicity or race differ from that of the male practitioners indigenous to these disciplines' countries of origin.

Martial dance theatre materialises as the result of a series of keyings that transform antique combat into martial arts, and martial arts into theatrical performance. Presentation of these productions before Western audiences rekeys them as performances of cultural Otherness. This process promotes new understandings of the martial arts. It reveals ambiguities in their homosociality, their affinity to dance and forms of play, and their contribution to the performative construction of idealised, ethnically specific masculinities.

This conclusion gives special consideration to the implications of martial dance theatre's engagement with Eurocentric primitivism. Contrasting perspectives might characterise the genre's performers as subverting the tropes of this discourse to advance a nativist agenda, or of accommodating its bias in a way that promotes neocolonial values. The ambiguous eroticism of martial dance theatre contributes to this duality, and flirtation might be considered the *modus operandi* of the genre. The Othering typifications it evokes are indeterminately keyed – as essential truths, explicit constructs, or something in between. The audience and performers are positioned in differing ranges of ironic contract to the performance.

This thesis proposes that the martial arts, when staged in a Western dance theatre frame, become performances of idealised, ethnically specific masculinities resonant with Eurocentric conceptions of ‘native’ men. However, Western experimental theatre performers have proposed that martial arts develop a quality of presence in practitioners that is transcendent of gender, ethnicity and race and cultural codes – a neutral state of optimal readiness. In the light of this thesis, how might the martial arts be seen to simultaneously create a culturally specific, gendered bodily display, and this transcendental presence? What criteria and contexts might allow this poise to be extricated from the performative enactment of gender and ethnicity – the identities – elaborated by martial arts practices?

Martial dance theatre adds a new lamination to the martial arts, which are contemporary continuations of antique means of combat. In particular, it elaborates the ways in which these disciplines have organised movements with combative potential into the fixed sequences of pattern practices and intimidation displays. These activities can be deployed as drills preparing practitioners for antagonistic engagement, but they also function as ritualised exhibitions of prowess. This aspect is made prominent when they are staged for the entertainment of audiences. Such framing invites comparison between the martial arts and dance for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals the choreographic and mimetic dimensions of pattern practices and intimidation displays. Secondly, in their public presentation at times of national celebration or in tourism contexts, the male practitioners perform as representative figures of their communities, and specifically their communities’ men and ideals of masculinity.

Contemporary martial dance theatre presents an integration of the martial arts with native and foreign dance and movement vocabularies, in a Western proscenium theatre frame. In their homelands, the genre’s performers are viewed as innovative artists. They are seen to depart from the conventions of customary or traditional stagings of the martial arts. However, their performances elaborate somewhat disavowed strategies evident in these preceding

presentations – in particular, the use of combative actions as expressive movements, and cultural syncretism.

The ‘aesthetics of transfer’ is intrinsic to the rekeying of the martial arts achieved by contemporary martial dance theatre. When performed abroad, performances in this genre are subject to a cultural decontextualisation that further alters the denotative value of the theatricalised martial actions that they present. These actions become movements facilitating the enactment of cultural ‘difference’ as a bodily spectacle. Through the aesthetics of transfer martial dance theatre performers are keyed as embodiments of the ‘Ancient Warrior’ archetype – an icon of primordial masculinity whose assertive presence is somewhat contradicted by his anachronistic and nostalgic air. In the post-colonial era, the martial arts have become used as presentations that model an ideal, ethnically specific masculinity. Contemporary martial dance theatre is a new development in the process, whereby such figures become rekeyed as spectacular Other natives.

When martial dance theatre productions tour abroad, performances that are innovative in their homeland become rekeyed as ‘exotic’ performances, in the sense that Balme uses the word. They provide what Goode calls – speaking of *Sutra* – “Just enough mystery” (Goode 2010). The genre’s cultural syncreticism bridges the cultural divide between its Other performers and their Western audiences. Contemporary martial dance theatre intermingles ‘strange’ and ‘familiar’ movement practices, and presents this combination in a Western dance theatre frame. The Other is presented in a way that accommodates the Western audience.

Contemporary martial dance theatre intercepts Eurocentric gender norms. Like all male dancers, its performers may be seen to deviate from heteronormative masculinity. They are men on display, and thus at risk of being perceived in a feminine role. Moreover, their movements exceed the restraint that underpins a heteronormative masculine corporeal style.

Yet the stigma of male dance is challenged by martial dance theatre. The male performers' presentation of martial actions suggests their conformity to conventions that define masculinity as synonymous with activity. Their 'doing' of combative tasks refutes their position as objects of display.

Contemporary martial dance theatre's engagement with Eurocentric gender norms, however, is complicated by the differences that distinguish the genre's performers from their Western audiences. The genre's staging of Otherness may invite audiences to assign gender attributes and sexual proclivities to the performers according to their ethnicity or race. On the one hand, as native men they may be seen as hypermasculine figures – primitives who are wild and virile. Such a viewpoint might authenticate their display of marital skill, as evidence of an innate prowess rather than a feigned act. Furthermore, it may counter the archetypical gender tropes that key male performers in a dance theatre frame as feminised figures. It could be said that Eurocentric essentialist perspectives key primitive and combative martial dance theatre performers as more masculine than white and Western male dancers.

On the other hand, contrary yet contiguous perspectives might identify the contemporary martial dance theatre performer as a diminutive and emasculated figure. He may be considered part of a primitive, feminine collective – Other to the white male hegemony, who are positioned as the West's 'natural' leaders. This perspective may exempt martial dance theatre performers from heteronormative values, but it also excludes them from participating in masculinity as determined by Eurocentric norms. In this way, martial dance theatre performers may be doubly keyed as feminine – being both indigenous Others and male dancers. Paradoxically, they are potentially figures of hypermasculinity or feminised masculinity.

New perspectives on the martial arts, particularly their role in a Western context, are offered by contemporary martial dance theatre. The genre invites consideration of how the

martial arts are always already symbolic interactions. Using Goffman's distinctions, framing martial arts actions as dance theatre movement vocabulary reduces their vestigial, 'utilitarian' value and promotes their aesthetic, 'pictographic' value instead (Goffman 1975:568). This rekeying elaborates how, even in their customary contexts, pattern practices and intimidatory displays are fixed sequences of 'would be' kicks and blows. Their choreographic organisation and the practitioner's 'cool' self-discipline ensures the violent power of these actions is curbed and absorbed. Pattern practices and intimidatory displays hold imminent violence in perpetual abeyance. They are performances of a what Klens-Bigman calls "potentially deadly practicality" that is sustained but not fully discharged (Klens-Bigman 2007).

The vestigial utility – and meditative value – of the martial arts is not wholly elided in martial dance theatre, but the rekeying of martial arts actions as dance theatre movements emphasises their playfulness. Their refinement of violence and pursuit of ideal combat offers martial artists a form of aggressive recreation, and provides onlookers with an arresting spectacle. Martial artists' actions are rough play: their combative potential is confined to dedicated and secluded arenas, limited further by internal rules and etiquettes. This argument has particular implications for exploring the current trend towards 'mixed martial arts,' or MMA. MMA full-contact contests mix formerly discrete kicking, striking and grappling martial arts. Such tournaments endeavour to restore actual conflict to codified combat, by broadening the rules of engagement. MMA seems to be the antithesis of martial dance theatre, whose upkeying of the martial arts adds to their distance from combat. Future research, however, might consider how MMA's function as broadcast entertainment might be seen to sustain aesthetic imperatives. In a sense, the emergent discipline pursues an impossible quest for actuality in a virtual arena: blood is spilt in play.

In addition to demonstrating the aesthetic aspects and playfulness of the martial arts, martial dance theatre also invites consideration of how these disciplines are implicated in the

formation of ethnically specific masculinities. On a fundamental level, the genre's juxtaposition of combative actions with dance vocabularies reveals how the martial arts – particularly when on display – may also function as a comparable repertoire of expressive movements. As such, their theatrical agency is exposed. Moreover, they are revealed as disciplines that inculcate practitioners with movement attributes that are signature features of the corporeal styles of men in their cultures. Like male dance, the martial arts might be seen as both distillations of their homeland's masculine physical culture, and schema that publish stylised ideals for such masculinities. Martial artists' capacities and demeanour might ordinarily be seen to affirm essentialist understandings of gender and ethnicity, but martial dance theatre's rekeying of the martial arts contributes to an understanding of their masculine identities as learnt, enacted and performative.

Contemporary martial dance theatre also invites consideration of how non-Western martial arts may always already address a Western gaze. The genre entertains a Eurocentric proclivity for objectifying Other martial artists as Ancient Warriors. Contemporary practice of indigenous martial disciplines might be seen to frame practitioners in a similar manner. These disciplines are identified with nativist agenda – declaring their communities' difference to a dominant, domestic majority, or foreign powers. However, they might be seen to work as tools of cultural diplomacy with the West in particular, because their practitioners' deeds and appearance resonate with essentialist Eurocentric ideas about native men. Questions might be raised about the strategic risks of engaging such foreign perceptions to further post-colonial nativist agendas. Such questions also pertain to martial dance theatre, and are addressed below.

The martial arts are practiced by predominantly – often wholly – male cohorts, and contemporary martial dance theatre exposes ambiguities in their homosociality. Martial artists' relationships are physical and intimate, and their bodies are the focus of each other's

critical gaze. They strive together to realise their common vision of an ideal combatant – who is also an ideal man. This description is organised to demonstrate that there is always already a homoerotic dimension to the homosociality of the martial arts. This potential is ordinarily held in suspension by practitioners' apparent focus on the utilitarian task of combat. This suggests their engagement in action, which might be gendered as masculine, and keys their physical intimacy and mutual objectification as incidental to this task. Additionally, in the arenas that ordinarily house the martial arts, explicitly homophobic statements and deeds may also serve to refute any suggestion of homosexual excitement.

The potential (homo)eroticism of the homosociality of the martial arts is made prominent in contemporary martial dance theatre. The genre's focus on creating visual spectacle negates the vestigial utility that ordinarily pertains to the martial arts. This rekeys the intimate physicality and objectification of men present in the disciplines. The presentation of intimidation displays and pattern practice in an aesthetic frame particularly reveals their celebratory exhibition of men's bodies, which is ordinarily bracketed as an incidental aspect of these practices. The threat of violence is definitively checked by the theatrical conventions at play, and the sensuality of this exhibition becomes foremost. Moreover, when the men on stage make contact, or draw near to doing so, the absence of conflict means that the sensuality of the martial arts' rough play is also brought to the fore. Finally, martial dance theatre makes no recourse to homophobic deeds. Performers in this genre do nothing to refute the homosexual potential of their homosocial intimacy, or to rebut the homosexual gaze that their display of their male virile bodies might invite.

Non-Western performers' interception of Eurocentric norms of gender, ethnicity and race is pivotal to the manifestation of the genre of contemporary martial dance theatre that this thesis explores. The cultural difference between martial dance theatre performers and their audiences is what gives the performances so grouped their common export value as

exotic performances. Moreover, whether or not it is the performers' or their producers' intention, this cultural difference inflects the genre with a nexus of historical and contemporary ethno-political tensions.

Contemporary martial dance theatre performers negotiate with the legacies of imperialism. They perform martial artist identities that have evolved as part of declarations of nativist values, addressing domestic and international socio-political audiences. This process has necessarily engaged with the Eurocentric norms that dominate the global arena at large, and are particularly perpetuated within former colonial nations and their former colonies. As an international genre, contemporary martial dance theatre intensifies this process by placing non-Western martial artist identities in direct interaction with Eurocentric tropes defining native men. Indeed, in martial dance theatre, a performer's capacity to embody the sensational archetype of the Ancient Warrior acquires a capital value. A crucial question is the degree to which this process leads to martial dance theatre performers' entrenchment or revision of essentialist tropes dominant in both their homelands and the foreign territories to which they tour.

It might be argued that contemporary martial dance theatre is a nativist genre that subverts and reclaims stereotypes of native masculinity in global circulation. Its innovative fusion of hereditary and foreign movement practices articulates the liminal cultural position of its urban cosmopolitan performers, whose lives are informed by local and international cultural values. Moreover, through their performance of martial dance theatre these artists enter an intercultural arena, which offers them opportunities to articulate their identities in ways not possible in domestic contexts. They may diverge from norms that constrain life in their homelands, and in particular explore playing Ancient Warriors as an empowering mask, which mobilises the exotic mimetic capital of their martial arts, and the corporeal capital of their physiques. The financial returns from martial dance theatre converts their hereditary

martial disciplines, and their athletic potential into a lucrative economic resource. As such, the genre may help advance indigenous self-determination. Martial dance theatre might be characterised as an upkeying of the obsolete antique means of combat preserved in indigenous martial arts. These skills are transvalued to become part of an international performance genre, which provides its performers with a contemporary means of self-expression, and furthers their artistic careers.

Contrarily, martial dance theatre might also be characterised as a genre that – wittingly or otherwise – continues a colonialist agenda, and dilutes the indigenous martial arts it stages. Through the operation of the aesthetics of transfer, these hereditary disciplines are diminished by becoming decontextualised. In their customary contexts, they possess a vestigial combative utility, and also a ritual efficacy as part of communal rites and soteriological practices. Martial dance theatre contains the martial arts in a theatre frame that reduces these disciplines to their superficial surface alone. Moreover, they are used to facilitate the objectification of their practitioners. The bias of a Eurocentric gaze is entrenched by the genre's encouragement of racial fetishism that verifies essentialist Eurocentric typifications of native men (operating in the performer's homelands as well as overseas). This line of analysis proposes that contemporary martial dance theatre dilutes preserved means of utilitarian combat into a form of Western superficial entertainment. The genre could be seen to convert valued heritage into a transient commodity.

The ways in which contemporary martial dance theatre might be seen to sustain either nativist or colonial values is indicative of the genre's pervasive ambiguity. Flirtation appears to be its *modus operandi*. Martial dance theatre presents combative actions as expressive gestures with ambiguous intent. The genre furthers the ambivalence that is intrinsic to the martial arts. The codes and etiquettes of these disciplines allow practitioners to play with violence – they flirt with danger. Combative actions in their secluded arenas have a denotative

value different to those that occur outside such a setting. In the martial arts, violent deeds become playful interactions. A gap is implied between an act's ultimate potential and the actor's immediate intention – a disconnection comparable to that which is observed in flirtation.

The theatrical frame of martial dance theatre widens the gap between appearance and intention found in the martial arts. The actual physical distance the genre places between the performers on stage and their audience contributes to this process. The performers address their audience directly with combative actions. In combination with their intense focus and martial mien this amounts to an act of confrontation. But the audience in the auditorium are literally and figuratively remote from the physical threats issued by these men. The purpose of martial dance theatre's markedly contained displays of aggression is ambiguous. This ambiguity is made pronounced by the threatening performer's obvious accommodation of their audience. Their violent actions are arranged in rhythmic and visual patterns to create an entertaining spectacle for the viewer. Martial dance theatre performers use martial arts actions not to threaten their audience with combative intent, but to treat them to a spectacle of their virility. The performers present displays of archetypically masculine gender attributes – strength, aggression, and utility – with a visceral charge.

Martial dance theatre performers flirt with, and through their enactment of combative intent, and they sustain a similarly ambivalent relationship to the primitivist Othering identities that their performance evokes. At its extremities, their vivid embodiment of such stereotypical figures could be understood to issue their Western audience with a hostile riposte, or to engage them in a playful and ironic interaction. For these reasons, martial dance theatre stratifies its audience, and its performers. Their relationships to the performance afoot is determined by each individual's conception of gender, ethnicity and race as essential truths

or performative constructs, and martial dance theatres affirmation or refutation of this personal understanding.

The prejudice of essentialist perspectives – both nativist and imperialist – may attribute a concomitancy of action and intention to the performers of martial dance theatre. That is, their stage gestures are evaluated as real actions, and measured for their verity as literal renderings of authentic native identities. This is what Goffman calls downkeying and Hanna calls actualisation (Goffman 1975:364; Hanna 1988:15). Alternatively, martial dance theatre might be seen as a parody of gender and ethnicity – a kind of drag. The substance of identity is questioned through the performers' staging of their flamboyant, native warrior personae. Performers and audiences of martial dance theatre might be positioned on a range of ironic contract between these polarities, which key the genre's performers as presenting as authentic natives, or parodic militants.

Contemporary martial dance theatre's equivocal relationship to the essentialist tropes it evokes is further complicated by the genre's indeterminate eroticism. The genre presents Western audiences with a performance of exotic masculinity with an ambisexual erotic charge. A number of factors contribute to this outcome. The performers gaze is nuanced by their cross training in martial, aesthetic, and soteriological disciplines. It communicates commingled messages of hostility, invitation, and indifference to their audience. Secondly, the vestigial utility of their combative actions may imply that the genre's performers are engaged with the task in hand, not the impression that their endeavours might create. As such, the bodily display they present to their audience – and the performers' intimate relationships – are keyed as incidental. Thirdly, the primitivist aesthetic of martial dance theatre (though inflected with nativism) keys the performers' eroticism as an innate indigenous trait – almost naïve. Finally, the stage personae the performers present might be compared to both conservative and queer Western models of masculinity. On the one hand, their aesthetic

parading of masculine attributes makes them similar to gay icons (and mass marketers' adaptations of such figures). On the other hand, the apparent youthfulness of martial dance theatre performers makes them like the classical ephebe. Their immaturity – their lack in both years and 'civilisation', according to Eurocentric values – inhibits the sexual threat of their performance, and assigns them instead a vulnerability, and perhaps availability.

The mixture of martial arts and dance in martial dance theatre could be considered a peculiar fusion of the archetypically masculine and feminine. Yet the genre might also be seen as a development of the aesthetic conventions of 'cool'. The genre's performers execute precisely controlled actions with impassioned intent. They present a demeanour in which restraint balances abandon. Their containment of heated emotions in structured movement sequences creates a stylized, and therefore sustainable, performance of male virility – with its connotations of both aggression and sexuality. Future research might consider how this too may be the principle mechanism and social purpose of the martial arts which the genre stages.

Contemporary martial dance theatre's position in the Western cultural spectrum is unclear. *Sutra* demonstrates an attempt to develop the genre as a highbrow idiom. At the other extreme *Mika HAKA*, with its elements of hip-hop and burlesque, could be considered lowbrow. The spirituality of *The Sound of Silence* resonates with the refined aesthetic of *Sutra*, but its erotic potential (though disavowed) aligns it with *Mika HAKA*. This might suggest that the production is an example of a middlebrow strain of contemporary martial dance theatre. It might also indicate that the genre's growth is because of its potential to exert a 'nobrow' appeal – that is, the capacity to simultaneously satisfy a range of audience expectations. In differing configurations, and from differing audience perspectives, martial dance theatre's combination of martial arts and dance theatre can be seen to offer either an exotic version of erotic male dance, or a new rendering of heroic themes central to European classicism.

In toto, contemporary martial dance theatre is not a composite form in which the martial arts and dance theatre merge. It is instead a conglomerate in which these discrete disciplines (and other movement practices the genre employs) remain distinct from one another, and stand in tension. The genre's juxtaposition of movement disciplines, and the varying modes of audience address they engender, results in what Goffman terms a "negative experience," in the sense that a martial dance theatre performance largely "takes its character from what it is not" (Goffman 1975:378-9). When "no particular frame is immediately applicable," says Goffman, reality "anomically flutters" (Goffman 1975:378-9). Martial dance theatre, like the pattern practices and intimidation displays it references, is neither an occurrence of combat, nor an expressive dance performance. Though at moments it might seem to be both, in other instances it may also seem to be neither.

What distinguishes the martial arts and creates their peculiar pleasure, for participants and spectators, is the volatility of rough play, evident in sparring and most paramount in contests. As such, the examples of martial dance theatre discussed in this thesis could be said to lack the danger and risk that their staging of combat might promise. Instead, the genre rekeys as dance theatre the always already aestheticised activities of pattern practice and intimidation displays. Such fixed sequences are undeniably intrinsic to the martial arts. Their isolation from sparring and contests in martial dance theatre obscures, however, their value as preparations for – or representations of – such contingent and extemporaneous engagements. In a sense, the genre's staging of pattern practice and intimidation displays frames the performers as combatants in perpetual training but never in action.

Moments in *Mika HAKA* and *The Sound of Silence* show a relationship between the martial arts and dance theatre that is something other than the adaptation and staging of elements of pattern practice and intimidation displays. In the song "Do You Like What You See," Torotoro's bodies form contorted silhouettes and precarious cantilevered balances. The

dancers resemble the improbable postures of the carved figures that decorate Māori meetinghouses. The dancers inhabit these visual forms with the intense presence they display when performing wero actions and haka. Similarly, in “Duet,” Madhu and Sajeew achieve a comparable integration. They progress through a series of geometric body shapes with the exceptional concentration and quality of precision they have acquired through mastery of the flying kicks and aerial turns of the *meppayattu*. These moments are examples of ‘martial artists dancing,’ in productions whose choreographic form more often presents the ‘martial arts as dance.’ Perhaps, as in some older meetings of combat and performance, the martial arts might best contribute to the creation of new dance by serving as a tool for development of the performers’ presence, rather than as a lexicon of movement vocabulary.

My own performance background leads me to consider how martial arts training might enable a performer to develop the qualities of ‘action’ that Grotowski sought.¹ Action for Grotowski is a moment of complete psychophysical unity, which his 1968 “Statement of Principles” described as mobilising “a totality of physical and mental reactions”(Grotowski 1968:211). Slowiak and Cuesta (Grotowski’s assistants in the 1980s) report that Grotowski identified the martial arts as practices that might evoke this synthesis because combat exercises have tangible results. In Slowiak and Cuesta’s words, “If you don’t do the right move, you get kicked” (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007:142). Barba elaborates a similar observation. In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* he says the martial artist learns “to be present at the very moment of an action” (Barba et al. 1991:197). Grotowski and Barba’s statements suggest that performers might use the martial arts to develop their psychophysical integration.

¹ From 1990-92, I undertook periodic training with Zygmunt Molik, founding member of Grotowski’s Teatr Laboratorium and Jolanta Cynkutis, who trained with Molik, and his peers Zbigniew Cynkutis and Rena Mirecka.

Zarrilli's exploration of the relationship between participation in the martial arts and training for theatrical performance was inspired in part by the work of Grotowski, and his writing references that of Barba. In *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* Barba considers the possibility of a condition in which a performer may be "present, without either representing anything or having any meaning" (Barba 1995:16). In his book, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski*, Zarrilli offers a more elaborated description of the state of presence that Barba identifies. Zarrilli uses terminology coined by David Edward Shaner in his book *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Perspective of Kukai and Dogen*. Zarrilli writes of a state of "prescencing [sic]" in which "intentions are neutralized" allowing for an expansive horizon of possibilities (Zarrilli 2009:32).

The martial arts might be seen as disciplines that foster this neutral presence. Daniel Mroz trained with Richard Fowler, a former member of Barba's company. Mroz is also a practitioner of Chinese martial arts. In 2008, writing to colleagues in the American Society for Theatre Research, he said that martial arts training de-emphasises emotional arousal and emphasises instead "the efficient use of the body's skeletal structure under the force of gravity" (Mroz 2008). Sally Harrison-Pepper in her chapter of *Asian Martial Arts in Actor Training*, edited by Zarrilli, describes sparring martial arts practitioners as entering a state balanced "between aggression and fear, moving and not-moving, tension and relaxation" (Harrison-Pepper 1993:39). Mroz and Pepper's comments describe an emotional equibalance and biomechanical efficiency fostered by the martial arts, a state comparable to that sought by Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli as a point of departure for performance.

Grotowski searched for moments of expression whose integrity derived from their incidental occurrence as the consequence of the precise performance of detailed physical actions (Grotowski 1997b:378). Barba's own pursuit of this phenomenon gives rise to this

maxim in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*: “It is the doing and how the doing is done which determine what one expresses” (Barba et al. 1991:187). The expressive dimensions of martial artists’ actions might be seen to arise in such an incidental manner, demonstrating the verity of this principle. Mark Law, in his book *The Pyjama Game: A Journey into Judo*, suggests that *judo* practitioners’ efficiency “creates an aesthetic” (Law 2007). In *Frame Analysis* Goffman proposes a similar idea when he describes the boxer’s grace as incidental (Goffman 1975:568). The formula that seems to be proposed by these collected comments is that the effective execution of a functional action may also give rise to the creation of an affective aesthetic form. Discussion of this idea is a recurrent topic in Goffman’s work. In *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour* he defines actions as “consequential, problematic, undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake” (Goffman 1967:185). In *Strategic Interaction*, he says that expression is “not an official end” of action, though it may be “a side effect” (Goffman 1970:5). When executing an action, says Goffman, a person may “give off expressions” but that this is different from this individual deliberately endeavouring to “transmit communications” (Goffman 1970:102 [*italics in original*]).

The martial arts’ potential to reveal to a performer this connection, between action and expression seems most pronounced not in pattern practice and intimidation displays – which are always already, in part, aesthetic – but during the concrete physical interactions of full-contact, free-form sparring. In these ‘fights’ a practitioner might connect to what Goffman in *Frame Analysis* calls the “innermost part” of the activity keyed as a martial art – that is, the part which “does or could have status as untransformed reality” (Goffman 1975:156). It is this layer of a framed activity, says Goffman, that engrosses participants because it remains – beneath the laminations created by various keyings – an “instrumental act” or, indeed, an action (Goffman 1975:157). Attempting to defeat an opponent promises participants an opportunity to become immersed in a moment of spontaneous and antagonistic instrumental

action. It is the possibility of such an instant that makes the martial arts distinct from the aesthetically determined process of dance.

This thesis, however, argues that actions framed as elements of a martial art become a kind of play, threat or fantasy. They gain a special denotative value through their incorporation into these codified activities. They are organised according to aesthetic principles, more than – or instead of – those of necessity. This is most obvious in the case of fixed sequences of intimidation displays and pattern practice. Deborah Klens-Bigman, in her online article “Yet More Towards a Theory of Martial Arts as Performing Art,” says that the Japanese *kata* show the same “slow-medium-fast” structure that Zeami proscribes for classical Japanese theatre in his Nōh treatise *Fūshikaden* (*The Flowering Spirit*) (Klens-Bigman 2007; Zeami 2006). Moreover, she adds, experts vivify this pre-determined progression with *ma* (pauses) of a kind that are also intrinsic to classical Japanese music (Klens-Bigman 2007). Additionally, in her earlier essay “Toward a Theory of Martial Arts as Performance Art,” Klens-Bigman says that as well as combative proficiency, a martial artist’s actions must also show “sincerity of effort and earnestness of heart” (Klens-Bigman 1999:13). Importantly, this observation might also pertain to the martial arts’ full-contact, free-form sparring. For example, in *The Pyjama Game* Law says that for *judo* traditionalists “it was not enough to defeat an opponent,” the defeat must be secured “with style” (Law 2007:62). He quotes Jigaro Kano, the founder of *judo*, who spoke of ideal practitioners as always “assuming graceful attitudes and performing graceful movements” (Law 2007:33).

The martial arts appear to offer a means to explore concrete action, but the fights framed by such disciplines are always occasions of abstracted – if not aesthetic – movement. In her book, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that the frame of ‘dance’ isolates human movement from everyday situations and “actual feelings,” transforming “actual components of movement into qualities of movement” (Sheets-

Johnstone 1966:71). She says, “Movement, through abstraction, becomes plastic” (Sheets-Johnstone 1966:71). Might this not be the case with full-contact, free-form sparring also? These ‘fights’ are part codified activities, secluded from daily life in special arenas. Even the impact of a blow within a martial arts context might be seen to have a specific denotative value determined by the culturally specific frame that surrounds it. This analysis may imply that the ideal of incidental expression arising from an instrumental act is a chimera. Any action undertaken within a frame oriented to matters other than the purely instrumental is already an expressive incident.

Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli’s engagement with the martial arts is further complicated by the proposition that actions derived from combat might have a transcultural expressive value. Grotowski, in his 1990 text “Performer,” speaks in mystical terms of a warrior as “a man of action” who is “outside aesthetic genres” (Grotowski 1997b:376). This statement is part of his extended theorising about what Slowiak and Cuesta call “those simple **actions** or **doings** that precede the differences of tradition, culture, or religion” (Slowiak and Cuesta 2007:41 [bold in original]). In *Beyond the Floating Islands* Barba questions the value of performers’ learning theatrical disciplines from cultures other than their own (Barba and Taviani 1986:95). He promotes, instead, the study of those elements common to culturally diverse practices (Barba and Taviani 1986:137). In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* he calls this an inquiry into “a transcultural ‘physiology’” (Barba et al. 1991:188).

The proposition of a transcultural dimension of human movement is problematic. Dance scholar Marcia B. Seigel, in a discussion transcribed in Gere’s volume *Looking Out*, acknowledges that physicality may be a universal element of all dance performance, but she is also aware that “physicality always takes place in reference to a context and that the context is not universal” (Seigel 1995: 191). In “Dance, Gender and Culture” Polhemus argues similarly for acknowledgement of “the cross-cultural relativity of corporal experience” (Polhemus

1998:172). Furthermore, he says that in any society “the men’s dance style is a crystallization of what it means to be a male member of their culture” (Polhemus 1998:177). This thesis argues that this is also true of the martial arts. These disciplines are interwoven with the performative construction of ethnically specific masculinities.

Zarrilli’s ideas suggest that the performative and socio-political dimensions of the martial arts – their contribution to the construction of gender and ethnicity, and articulation of nationhood – might be differentiated from their potentially transcultural value as experiential practices. In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, Zarrilli acknowledges that participation in *kalarippayattu* keys its male practitioners as embodiments of “an idealized image of Malayāli manhood”; their bodies and actions acquire value as totems of “Kerala heritage,” emblems that have contributed to formation of “modern Kerala state as a political entity, and to Malayāli identity as a distinct socio-political formation” (Zarrilli 1998:24). Zarrilli’s writing about training Western performers, however, implies that though the martial arts are corporeal styles with totemic value, these disciplines also foster a practitioner’s bodily self-awareness, which may enrich a performers’ practice – regardless of their gender, ethnicity or race. In his 2001 article, “Negotiating Performance Epistemologies: Knowledges ‘about’, ‘in’ and ‘for’,” Zarrilli references Turner’s discussion, in his book *Regulating Bodies*, about Helmuth Plessner’s concepts of ‘*der Lieb*’ and ‘*der Körper*’ (Zarrilli 2001:32). *Körper*, says Turner, refers to “the objective, exterior, and insitutionalised body,” whereas *Lieb* refers to “the animated, living, experiential body” (Turner 1992:41). Zarrilli’s 2006 essay, “Senses and Silence in Actor Training and Performance,” develops this distinction in relation to the specific demands of the performer’s craft. He distinguishes the performer’s “aesthetic ‘outer’ body,” offered for “the abstractive gaze” of the spectator, from the performer’s “aesthetic ‘inner’ body-mind,” – a self-experience developed through extra-daily modes of practice, such as martial arts (Zarrilli 2006:49).

Turner points to Max Scheler and Paul Schilder's warnings that "we should not treat the objective body (*Körper*) as a separate entity from the inner sensations of the subjective body (*Lieb*)" (Turner 1992:56). As such, the idea of separable outer and inner aesthetic bodies is problematic (even in theoretical terms), and it is made more so when a transcultural value is attributed to the latter, as Zarrilli's use of the martial arts in performer training seems to suggest. In "Senses and Silence," Zarrilli acknowledges: "Each particular culture, historical, or artistic/pedagogical practice over time develops a version of the aesthetic inner body-mind" (Zarrilli 2006:57). In *Acting (Re)considered: Theories and Practices* he says specifically that in traditional Asian mythologies the body is not the physical entity of Western conjecture separate from "mental, emotional, cosmological, and philosophical modes of existence," but an instantiation of all them (Zarrilli 1995:79). In this light, *der Lieb* developed by the martial arts is as culturally determined as *der Körper*.

The martial arts are corporeal styles that create aesthetic outer bodies, implicated in ideals of gender and ethnicity in their cultures of origin. The inner aesthetic mind-body the disciplines engender is similarly and simultaneously culturally defined. Martial dance theatre productions might be characterised as parading the cultural masks sustained by indigenous martial disciplines to delight a Western gaze. Yet the theories and ideals of experimental theatre practice explored here might also be seen to promote a distinctly Western regard, with patriarchal and imperial nuances.

In her book, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz argues against the kind of universalising about human experience that underpins the theorising of Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli. Grosz says: "Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities" (Grosz 1994:19). Her call for recognition of the absolute specificity of human experience suggests that performers' engagements with a martial art cannot be considered in abstract terms concerning 'actions,'

‘doings,’ ‘prescencing,’ and ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ bodies. Rather, they should be considered in terms of participants’ approximation or subversion of the performative constructs of gender, ethnicity and race, with which these culturally specific disciplines are inextricably interwoven. Indeed, in terms laid out by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant in their article “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason,” the proposition that such an engagement could yield something other than this might be seen “to universalize particularisms” in a way that advances a Eurocentric cultural perspective (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999:41). It may belie the Western researchers’ privileged indifference to the value of the specificities of culture.

Slowiak and Cuesta explain that Grotowski’s work proposes a quest for activity that precedes difference – ‘acts and doings’ from a stratum of human experience untransformed by culture. The martial arts, as forms of vigorous combat, seem to promise access to such a dimension. Yet these practices are not untransformed. They are culturally specific, codified interpretations of combat. In addition to observing rules and conventions, participants also always address an audience – practitioners of differing seniority, and onlookers ranging from aficionados to tourists. The rules, conventions, and evaluating gaze of the audience make these codified combat disciplines into a play activity with spectacular dimensions. They are performances, on a continuum with theatre.

This is particularly true of intimidation displays and pattern practices used in the creation of contemporary martial dance theatre. The kaiwero’s spinning weapons and the haka performer’s thrusting fists hit nobody, and the *kaḷarippayattu* trainee practicing *meppayattu*, and the monk drilling *kung fu*, both kick thin air. In such activities practitioners’ actions have no immediate combative objective. Though emphasis is directed to their potential utilitarian value, aesthetic concerns may come to predominate. Martial arts are spectacles with a symbolic value; they are memorials that lionise ancestral techniques of warfare, and the

warriors who deployed them. In the post-colonial era, they have become expressions of the quintessence of their societies' homeland cultures.

This matter seems disregarded in the research that Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli propose, for it requires the abstraction of the transcultural principles from very particular martial arts. This process necessarily involves the isolation of movements or incidents in search of examples that reveal transcendent principles. This practical abstraction in pursuit of conceptual abstractions might be seen to elide the specificity of bodies that Grosz asserts. It also invites a leap of faith, that such elision promises more than an absurd reduction. Contemporary martial dance theatre suggests that the intercultural reach of the martial arts is all about their interception of the constructs of gender, ethnicity and race. If there are aspects of them useful to a performer that are distinguishable from these dimensions, then how might they be separated off? What keying might achieve this abstraction?

In *Performance and Cosmopolitics* Gilbert and Lo cite Ric Knowles' comments, in his book *Reading the Material Theatre: Theatre and Performance Theory*, about international arts festivals and their fringe events. Knowles says:

Cultural difference, in these contexts, tends to either be packaged for consumption as exotic or charming... or, as in high modernity formalism, to be treated as energizing but fundamentally incidental local variants on a (therefore more important) universality or transcendent humanism (Gilbert and Lo 2007:113).

Knowles proposes that transcendent humanism may be the universal value that cosmopolitan intercultural theatre prioritises. Contrarily, this thesis suggests that the aspects in contemporary martial dance theatre that communicate across cultural divides may be visceral and elemental – fundamental rather than transcendental.

Contemporary martial dance theatre presents the martial arts on stages in spaces configured like proscenium arch auditoria, at festivals like those that Knowle considers. The genre makes particular use of the head-on audience-performer meeting that such an arrangement creates. In these performances diverse movement disciplines sometimes fuse, but

often stand in juxtaposition to one another. The performers have a dual identity as marital artists and dancers. They present as both antagonistic combatants and welcoming entertainers. This invests their movements with an ambiguity. Isolated from their native cultural context, and rekeyed by Eurocentric perspectives, these movements become expressions in which messages of violent threat and sexual promise are confused. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman considers how “ordinary body movements” in “the frame of everyday activity” are understood to be a “symptom, expression, or instance of the doer’s being – his intent, will, mood, situation, character” (Goffman 1975:569). Behind such expression, he says, “will often be found some threat, distant or close, of physical force, and some inclination, encouraged or not, to direct sexual contact” (Goffman 1975:569). In intercultural dance performance, specific codes and aesthetic conventions fall away, and the level of response that Goffman describes comes to the fore, and attributes meanings to the performers’ actions. I propose the transcultural reach of contemporary martial dance theatre is the direct visceral appeal for audiences of its display of male bodies. The genre’s familiar aspect, that balances the strange and creates an exotic performance for Western audiences, is the immediacy of this corporeality, and its erotic potential in particular.

Contemporary martial dance theatre’s rekeying of the martial arts prompts new understandings of martial artists as men always on display. The martial arts – as kinds of male dance – can be considered distillations of the less explicitly codified repertoires of masculine stylised acts that Butler identifies as the building blocks of a corporeal style. Martial dance theatre’s theatricalisation of the martial arts reveals how these combative disciplines – and specifically their public presentation – contribute to the performative construction of gender and ethnicity in their homelands, as well as the representation of their homeland cultures and peoples abroad. Yet when transposed to a Western arena and presented for Western audiences the martial arts’ cultural specificity – as preservations of male warrior traditions and nativist

icons – is eclipsed by their value as displays of difference, which the companies' bodily displays make one of somatic traits as much (if not more) than cultural markers.

This analysis might imply that contemporary martial dance theatre performers are involved in a conscious manipulation of their identity. In *When Men Dance*, Fisher and Shay propose that after a performer has learned the rules and styles governing masculine and feminine dance “it gets easier to assume that gender in daily life also has a performative component” (Fisher and Shay 2009:10). They say: “Each dancer makes choices about how he performs masculinity or femininity or some combination less easy to label” (Fisher and Shay 2009:10-1). It is difficult to see all performers of contemporary martial dance theatre as performing their ethnically specific masculinities in the way that Fisher and Shay's ideas might imply. It suggests that their martial arts and dance practice, and their combining of the two, is undertaken by a part of their selves that retains an essential separateness from these identities. Yet movement disciplines such as the marital arts and dance are crystallisations of corporeal styles. They may deepen rather than lessen performers' immersion in the pervasive and concealed constraints that, Butler proposes, underpin and sustain gender norms – and, perhaps, in light of Lee's ideas, also ethnicity and race. Contemporary martial dance theatre may be an incidental presentation, rather than a deliberate performance, of ethnically specific, masculine identities.

The analysis of contemporary martial dance theatre suggests that the theatrical impact of martial arts actions arises from iteration – or reiteration – of gender, ethnicity and race. This observation offers new perspectives on the working practices developed by Grotowski, Barba and Zarrilli. Their quest for transcendental principles of performance often involves male and female Western practitioners participation in non-Western movement disciplines, which are ordinarily the preserve of men or women of specific ethnicities. This situation frustrates the disciplines' performative capacities to articulate idealised identities, in which

gender, ethnicity and race seamlessly merge. A subversive repetition of the disciplines and wrong iterations of identity are created. But this process is not undertaken for the sake of parody, but as an odyssey: Zarrilli seeks the inner aesthetic body, Barba transcultural principles, and Grotowski “techniques of sources” (Grotowski 1997a:261). Their focus is on essential understandings that participation in the discipline might offer. While some details of the discipline are vital to this process, their focus seems to look beyond the substance of the practice, and may, therefore, disregard it.

I think non-native practitioners’ engagement with culturally specific movement disciplines inevitably produces a sensibility like that which Fisher and Shay discuss. Zarrilli’s distinction of an inner and outer aesthetic body suggests that *Der Lieb* and *Der Körper*, though interwoven, may be distinguishable. Perhaps, a white woman cannot represent ideal Malayāli manhood, but may perfect *kaḷarippayattu*, and undergo the psychophysical transformation the discipline brings. But what such a process seems certain to offer her is an awareness of the ways in which the movement discipline is interwoven with an idealised, ethnically specific masculinity. Her perpetual failure to approximate this ideal exposes the relationship between the martial art and Malayāli masculinity.

Grotowski considered the martial arts a context wherein engagement with concrete action might offer Western theatre practitioners access to experience preceding cultural difference. After twenty-three years of my ‘wrong’ repetition of *bharatanāṭyam*, I propose that Western theatre practitioners’ engagement with culturally specific practices, like the martial arts and dance, develops an acute awareness of the performativity of the self. Such an awareness might also be seen to nuance Mokoera’s breaking and Taupuhi’s haka, Madhu and Sajeev’s usurpation of the female *bharatanāṭyam* dancer, and Cherkaoui’s *kung fu*. The question remains to what degree this perception might be ‘that’ which precedes the

differences, or a state of alienation created by performance practice that seeks to transgress differences that are substantial and matter.

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